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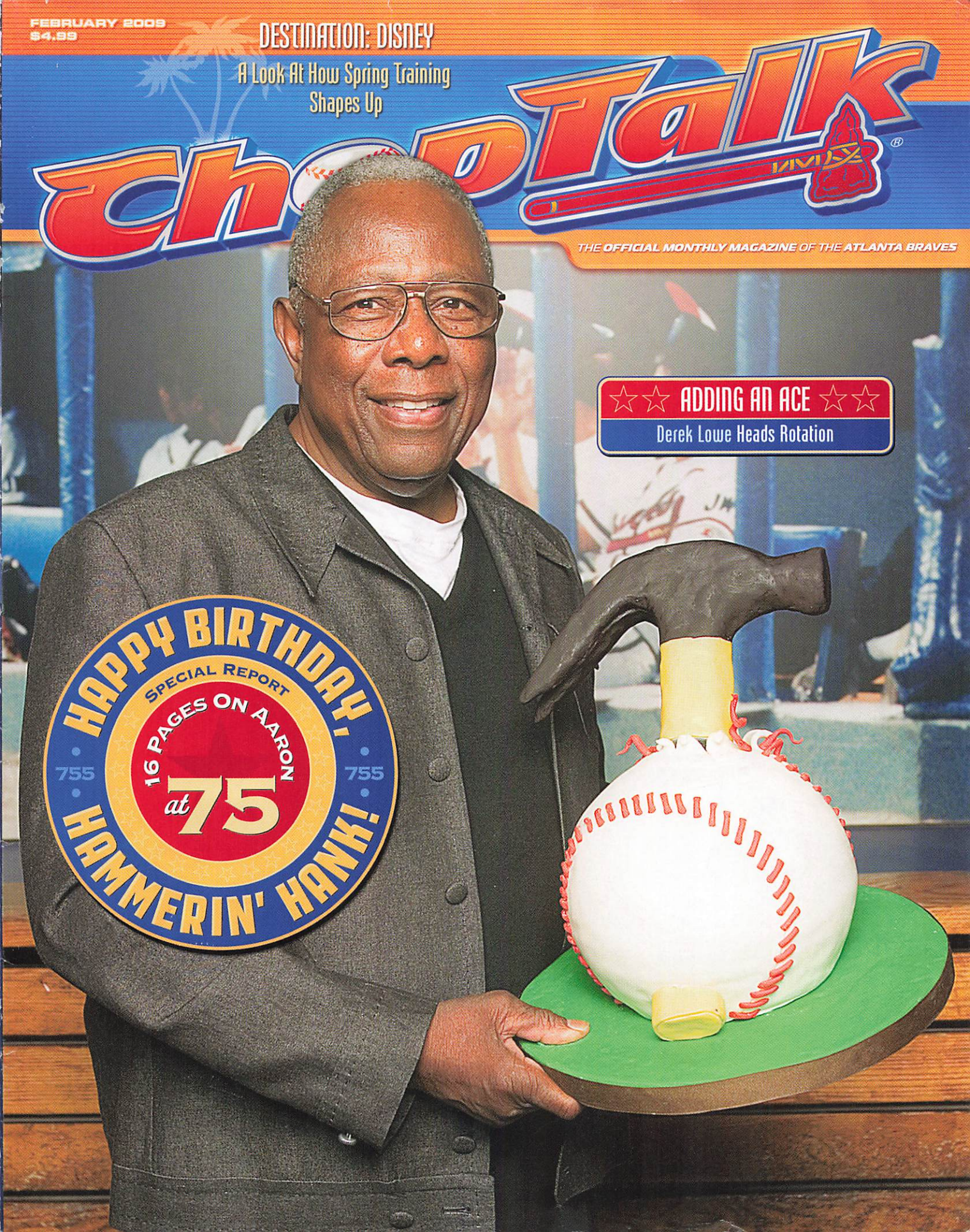

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BATTING ORDER

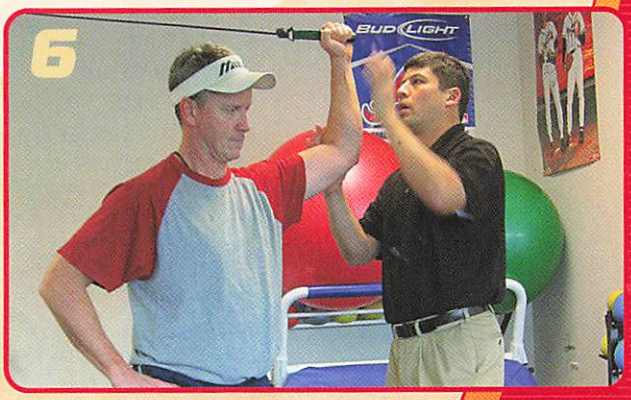
FEBRUARY 2009

POWER HITTERS

6-9
A RACE AGAINST FATHER TIME
With Spring Training Approaching, 40-Something Glavine's Working To Beat The Clock By Patty Rasmussen

18-19
PLAYING PEPPER
Kelly Johnson Fields Our Questions About Baseball And Newlywed Life Interview By Patty Rasmussen

20-21
DESTINATION: DISNEY
Cox, Chipper and McCann Lead Team Into A Challenging Spring Training By Gary Caruso



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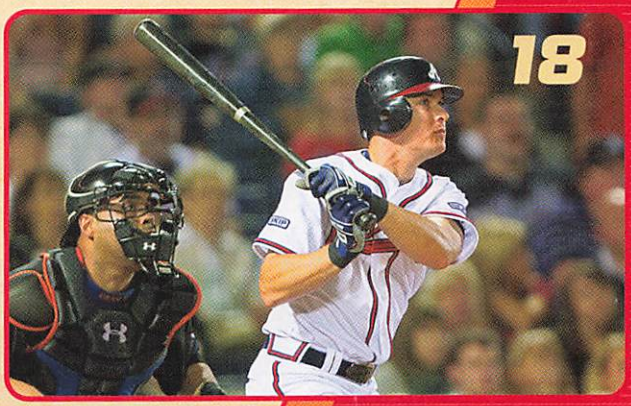

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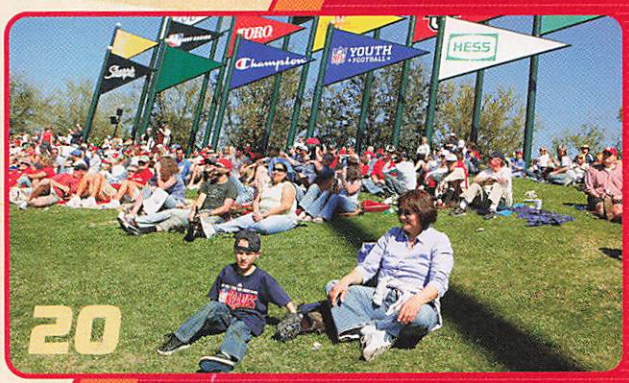


DISNEY

SPECIAL COVERAGE The HAMMER at 75

22-24
KING HENRY
Dethroned Or Not, Aaron Feels Like He's Still On Top Of The World By Brian Lee

25
A SAMPLING
The Legacy: 755 Home Runs - And A Whole Lot More

26-27
THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE
Nearly 35 Years After No. 715, Aaron's On The Road More Than The Players By Jon Cooper

28-30
THE MAKING OF A LEGEND
A Remarkable Journey From Cross-Handed Hitter To Home Run King By Bob Buege

32-33
BIG SHOT POSTER
The Accomplishments of #44, Henry Louis Aaron

34-36
A PIECE OF GREATNESS
Wide Variety of Aaron Memorabilia Increasing In Popularity - And Cost - All The Time By Steve Fall

38-40
PINCH-HITTER SUPREME
Norton Returning After Year as One of Baseball's Best Bats Off the Bench By Jon Cooper

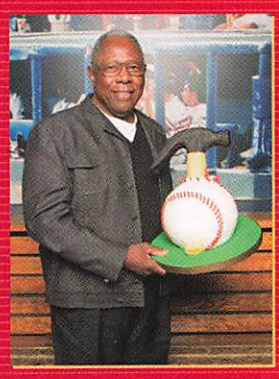
43
SURPRISE EXIT
Smoltz Opts For Boston's Up-Front Money Over Wren's Incentive-Laden Deal By Mark Bowman of MLB.com

COVER CREDITS

HANK AARON
by Allison Shirreffs

"Hammer Cake"
by Matty Cakes Bakery

Design by Clark Odom



BATTING ORDER

FEBRUARY 2009

SINGLES HITTERS

12-13 SCOREBOARD
14-15 BUNTS & BASEHITS
16-17 OFF THE FIELD
41 BEHIND THE NUMBERS By Steve Fall
54-55 HEROES & HISTORY
Otis Nixon Helping Others Combat Addiction While He Does The Same By Brian Knapp
56 ALUMNI NOTES
58-59 BEYOND BASEBALL By Patty Rasmussen
60-61 TALKIN' CHOP
62 XTRA INNINGS
The Art Of Being A Fan By Patty Rasmussen

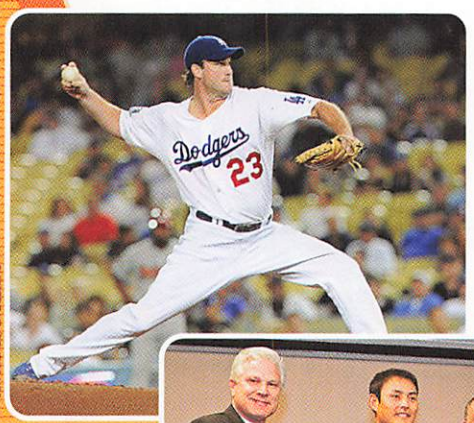
PITCHERS

11 PAINTING THE CORNERS
By Jay Busbee
15 FRANK WREN
17 BOBBY COX
36 BATTER UP! By Boone Logan
40 AROUND BASEBALL
By Ken Rosenthal of FoxSports.com
57 GARY CARUSO
61 JOHNNY SAJEM'S CARTOON

PINCH-HITTERS

47 STAT PARADE
50 SPRING TRAINING SCHEDULE, INFO
51 TICKET/TURNER FIELD INFO
52-53 2009 SCHEDULE CALENDAR
55 HOW I MADE IT TO THE MAJORS
By Steve Fall
56 BIRTHDAYS
62 FAN CLUBS GUIDE

14



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ON DECK

48-49 FARM SYSTEM ROUNDUP By Bill Ballew
49 DOWN ON THE FARM By Tommy Hanson

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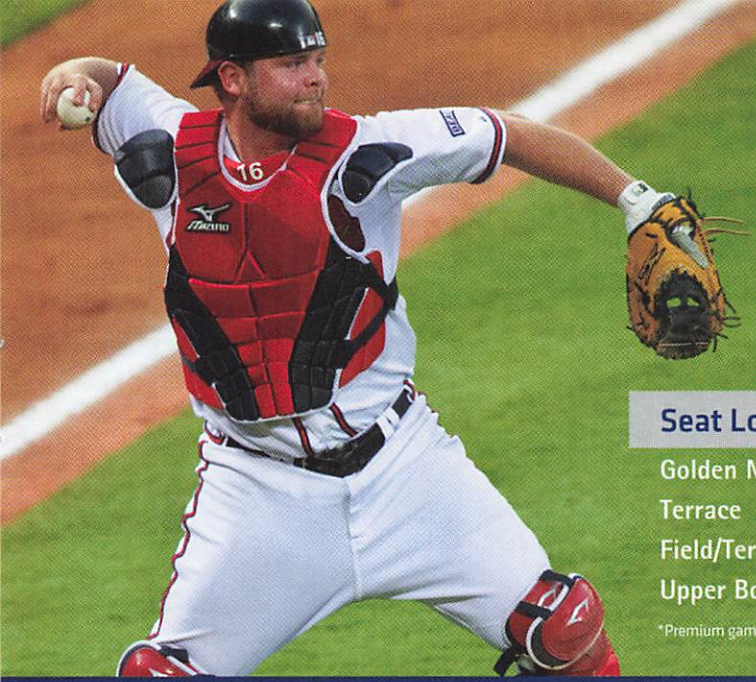

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APRIL

			1	2	3 DET*	4 DET*
5 PHI	6	7 PHI	8 PHI	9	10 WAS	11 WAS
12 WAS	13	14 FLA	15 FLA	16 FLA	17 PIT	18 PIT
19 PIT	20 WAS	21 WAS	22 WAS	23	24 CIN	25 CIN
26 CIN	27 STL	28 STL	29 STL	30		

MAY

					1 HOU	2 HOU
3 HOU	4 NYM	5 NYM	6 FLA	7 FLA	8 PHI	9 PHI
10 PHI	11 NYM	12 NYM	13 NYM	14	15 ARI	16 ARI
17 ARI	18 COL	19 COL	20 COL	21 COL	22 TOR	23 TOR
24 TOR	25 SF	26 SF	27 SF	28 ARI	29 ARI	30 ARI
31 ARI						

JUNE

	1	2 CHI	3 CHI	4 CHI	5 MIL	6 MIL
7 MIL	8 PIT	9 PIT	10 PIT	11 PIT	12 BAL	13 BAL
14 BAL	15	16 CIN	17 CIN	18 CIN	19 BOS	20 BOS
21 BOS	22	23 NYY	24 NYY	25 NYY	26 BOS	27 BOS
28 BOS	29	30 PHI				

JULY

			1 PHI	2 PHI	3 WAS	4 WAS
5 WAS	6 CHI	7 CHI	8 CHI	9 COL	10 COL	11 COL
12 COL	13 ALL STAR GAME ST LOUIS	14	15	16 NYM	17 NYM	18 NYM
19 NYM	20 SF	21 SF	22 SF	23 SF	24 MIL	25 MIL
26 MIL	27	28 FLA	29 FLA	30 FLA	31 LAD	

AUGUST

						1 LAD
2 LAD	3 SD	4 SD	5 SD	6 LAD	7 LAD	8 LAD
9 LAD	10	11 WAS	12 WAS	13	14 PHI	15 PHI
16 PHI	17	18 NYM	19 NYM	20 NYM	21 FLA	22 FLA
23 FLA	24	25 SD	26 SD	27 SD	28 PHI	29 PHI
30 PHI	31 FLA					

SEPT/OCT

		1 FLA	2 FLA	3 FLA	4 CIN	5 CIN
6 CIN	7	8 HOU	9 HOU	10 HOU	11 STL	12 STL
13 STL	14	15 NYM	16 NYM	17 NYM	18 PHI	19 PHI
20 PHI	21 NYM	22 NYM	23 NYM	24	25 WAS	26 WAS
27 WAS	28 FLA	29 FLA	30 FLA	1 WAS	2 WAS	3 WAS
4 WAS						

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A RACE AGAINST FATHER TIME

With Spring Training Approaching, 40-Something Glavine's Working To Beat The Clock And Surgery

BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

Father Time spares no one. And his clock is ticking on Tom Glavine, who is in the race of his life to stay ahead of the aging curve long enough to get a contract from the Braves and add to his career victory total of 305 that has him pointed toward Cooperstown.

Glavine hopes that by the time this story is read, a significant question will be answered: "Can I pitch again?"

His own cautious optimism, based on steady progress in the rehabilitation of his surgically repaired left elbow and shoulder, tells him, "Yes, I can."

But it was early January when he posed the question himself, and ever-cautious Glavine was quick to add, "I don't want to get ahead of myself."

Glavine, a 42-year-old free agent (turns 43 Mar. 25), ranks fourth on the list of all-time winningest left-handed pitchers and 21st overall. With 10 more wins, he would vault all the way to 17th place and be just 3 victories shy of Phil Niekro (318), who ranks 16th.

If Jamie Moyer (246 career wins), another soft-tossing lefty, can win 16 games at age 45 for the Phillies, as he did last year to earn a new two-year contract through 2010 when he'll be nearly 48, Glavine and the Braves have to believe he's capable of continuing to pitch if his arm is sound.

In the course of his Braves career, Glavine has won 244 games, earned two Cy Young Awards, in 1991 and 1998, and pitched an incredible 1-hitter over 8 innings in decisive Game 6 of the 1995 World Series to win Series MVP honors. After a five-year stint with the Mets (2003-2007), Glavine was welcomed back to the Braves last year with the hope of helping anchor a rotation featuring Tim Hudson, John Smoltz, Mike Hampton and Jair Jurrjens.

But the injury bug hit the Braves hard. By the end of the season, only Jurrjens and Hampton were still pitching. No one was more disappointed by the turn of events than Glavine who, for the first time in his 21-year career, spent time on the disabled list.

"It was frustrating because if the season had gone according to plan, we could have done something. We had a pretty good team," he said. "And it was disappointing because I came back to Atlanta to provide some stability, and I was unable to provide it."

Instead of leading the next generation of pitchers to a new era of Braves dominance, Glavine was confronted with a different and uncomfortable reality: Rehab and the uncertainty of knowing whether he would ever pitch again.

Undaunted and true to his nature, Glavine is taking the same methodical approach to rehab that he took to pitching as he attempts to cheat Father Time and get another season of pitching under his belt.

Working out with Braves physical therapist Lloyd van Pamelen at the Gwinnett Medical Center - Sports Medicine & Rehabilitation Center 10 minutes from his Alpharetta home, five days a week, up to three hours most days, Glavine goes through his paces, using a series of exercises designed to strengthen his left arm, specifically his elbow and shoulder, for the long, arduous season.

In mid-December, Glavine began throwing to van Pamelen, 60 feet for the first week, stretching out to 120 feet by right before Christmas.

"I was a little achy the night after I (first) threw 120 feet, but (the soreness) went right away," said Glavine.

By January, his arm strength was at 75 percent, and he was throwing 120 feet every other day with no ill effects. The next step was throwing off the mound during the second full week of January.

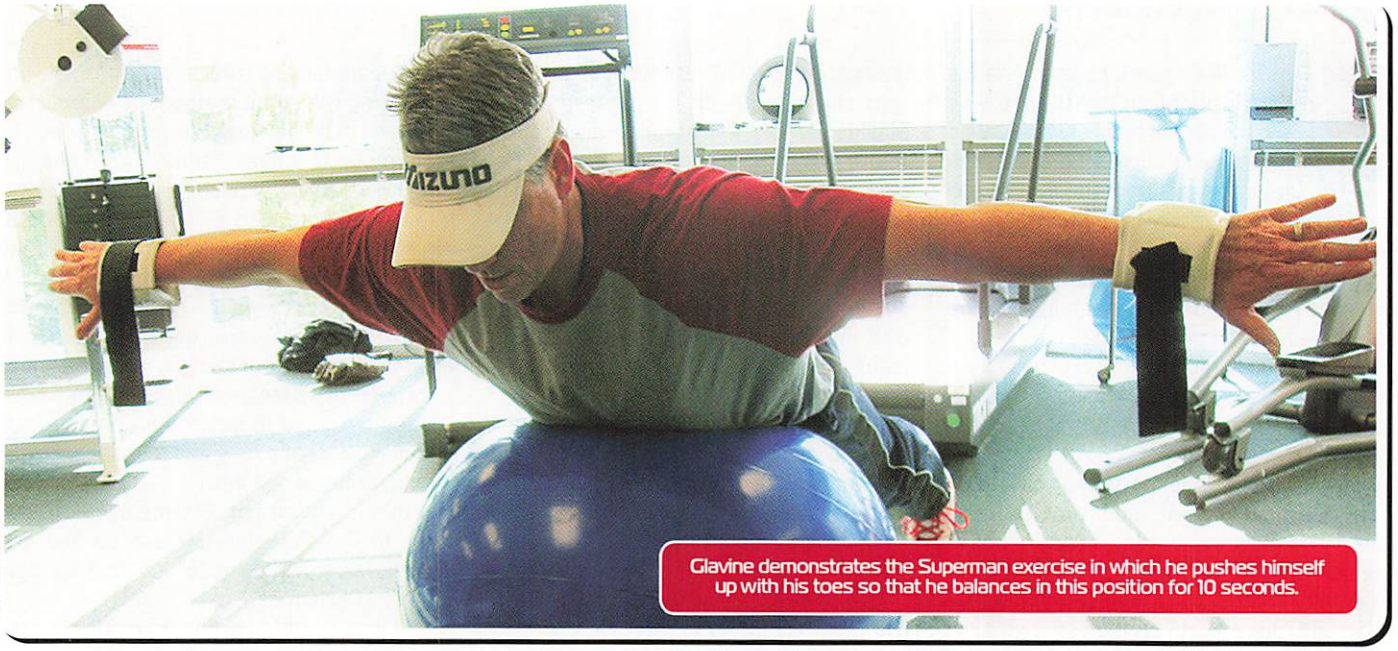
"When I start throwing off the mound,

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

PATTY RASMUSSEN

Glavine works out three hours a day, five days a week under the supervision of Braves physical therapist Lloyd van Pamelen at the Gwinnett Medical Center - Sports Medicine & Rehabilitation Center with the hope of overcoming elbow and shoulder surgery to pitch for the Braves again.

PATTY RASMUSSEN



PATTY RASMUSSEN

Glavine demonstrates the Superman exercise in which he pushes himself up with his toes so that he balances in this position for 10 seconds.

that's going to be a big part of knowing whether or not I can pitch again. So, I think I'll know in the next month, possibly by the end of January," he said. "Once I get on the mound, it's going to be full steam ahead for me, because if I were going to have a major problem, I would have had it by now, and that hasn't happened."

van Pamelen agreed.

"Definitely, the further along you are before the 'bump in the road' or any type of setback says a lot about how well you're going to do at the end," he said.

The disabled list and rehab were uncharted territory for Glavine, whose first stint on the DL came on April 18 when he was sidelined with a strained right hamstring. At the time, he joked about it.

"Who would have thought that after all those years of pitching, the first time I was on the DL it would be for a hamstring (instead of his arm)," said Glavine, who was activated 15 days later.

It turned out that was the first of three trips to the DL, and it was no laughing matter. In early May, Glavine began experiencing elbow pain that he now admits interfered with his legendary concentration. He managed the pain as best he could until finally, on June 10, after struggling through three innings against the Cubs, Glavine was pulled from the game.

"I had pain with virtually every pitch I threw," he said. "On a scale of 1 to10 with 10 being 'excruciating and tears coming to your eyes,' it was a 6."

Elbow pain was something new for Glavine, who pitched with shoulder pain for years after developing a partial rotator cuff tear in 1992. Back then, he decided to pitch and rehab at the same time, and by 1994, had learned to manage the pain when it flared up.

"I learned how to pitch with the shoulder pain. I could drop my arm down to a different slot and still throw, but I couldn't do that with my elbow," he said. "I was always thinking about the pain, about which pitches would hurt my elbow. It hurt most when I threw my breaking balls, so I started relying on my changeups and sliders and hoped they'd be effective enough."

> "IF I WERE GOING TO HAVE A MAJOR PROBLEM, I WOULD HAVE HAD IT BY NOW, AND THAT HASN'T HAPPENED."

An MRI on June 12 revealed a partial tear in his left elbow's flexor tendon. He decided to rest his elbow, hoping the tear would scar over, thinking he'd return in a month's time. Two months later, in August and, ironically, against the Cubs again, Glavine gave up seven runs in four innings before calling it quits and accepting the fact that season-ending surgery was his only option.

While performing surgery to repair the torn tendon, Dr. James Andrews also did minor repair work around Glavine's left labrum, part of the rotator cuff, the muscles that move the shoulder. Andrews reported that there were no arthritic changes to the shoulder and that he expected Glavine to make a full recovery from the surgery, leaving open the possibility of pitching in the future. It was welcome news.

"I don't think I have anything to prove on the field," said Glavine. "I've accomplished a lot more than I ever thought I would in baseball, but it's a personal challenge for me not to end my career that way. I had 21 years of playing baseball a certain way, and I don't want to end hurt."

So he rehabs. His workout days begin around 8:30 a.m. when he arrives at the rehab facility. The room has an entire wall of windows, and sunlight fills the room. He starts with a series of repetitions using 4-pound hand-held weights. He does chest pulls and lateral lifts, taking his time, chatting with van Pamelen, sometimes chatting with other rehab patients.

Next, Glavine picks up an 8-pound ball and bounces it against what looks like a trampoline leaning against a wall. First, he throws it straight out from his chest like a chest press, then he throws it over his head.

Glavine knows the routine, and after lifting, lies on a training bed while van Pamelen stretches his left arm. At around 9:45, they get their gloves, and Glavine grabs his spikes, and they walk outdoors to throw.

Few of the commuters driving past the center know it's Glavine engaged in long toss out on the front lawn. The two began tossing the ball as van Pamelen gradually

walks backward until he's 120 feet away.

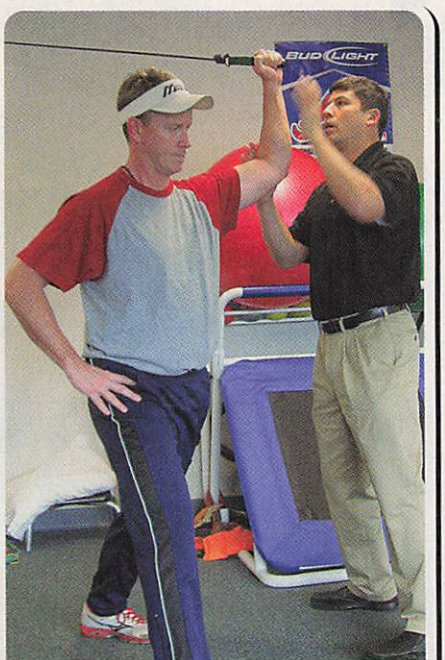
Glavine's smooth easy motion suddenly gives way as he grabs his arm, crying, "Ahh!" He looks up smiling, "Gotcha!"

They make three sets of 25 throws, with Glavine giving the last 5 to 7 throws of each set a little extra zing. He's encouraged by the result.

"There are two things I'm looking for - better arm strength and better recovery," he said. "I definitely feel more carry and more velocity today, and that's what you look for. I couldn't do long toss last spring training, so I'm already ahead. Looking back at last winter, I see that I accelerated my throwing program too quickly. I started the season feeling crappy, even before reporting to spring training, and I never got better."

> **"I HAD 21 YEARS OF PLAYING BASEBALL A CERTAIN WAY, AND I DON'T WANT TO END HURT"**

After throwing for about 30 minutes, they go back inside for more stretching and resistance exercises, using rubber tubing attached to the wall. Then, strapping on 2-pound wrist weights, Glavine performs a series of deep lunges, thrusting his right and left arms. The exercise works the muscle over the shoulder blade.



Glavine has never on the disabled list until last year when he finally relented to surgery Aug. 21 to have the flexor tendon in his elbow repaired and minor cleanup work performed on his shoulder.

PATTY RASMUSSEN

"He's supposed to use the back muscle to pull his hand back," said van Pamelen.

Next, working the same muscle group, Glavine does a set of "Supermans," a balancing exercise on a large Physio ball. Pushing himself up on his toes, Glavine balances himself on the ball while holding his arms out to the side, perfectly still. It's tougher than it looks, and Glavine does seven, holding each pose for 10 seconds.

"I know I've gotten better," he said. "I used to be shaking at 10 seconds."

While Glavine does his Supermans, van Pamelen readies an Isokinetic resistance machine in order to take a measurement of Glavine's arm strength, both right and left.

"The machine quantifies resistance," said van Pamelen. "Whatever (Glavine) puts out is what the machine gives back."

Glavine lies on a table and grasps a lever, moving it back and forth at different speeds to see how much force he can apply. It's a grueling exercise. He works the lever back and forth, increasing speed and force when instructed by van Pamelen. He gasps when he's told to stop.

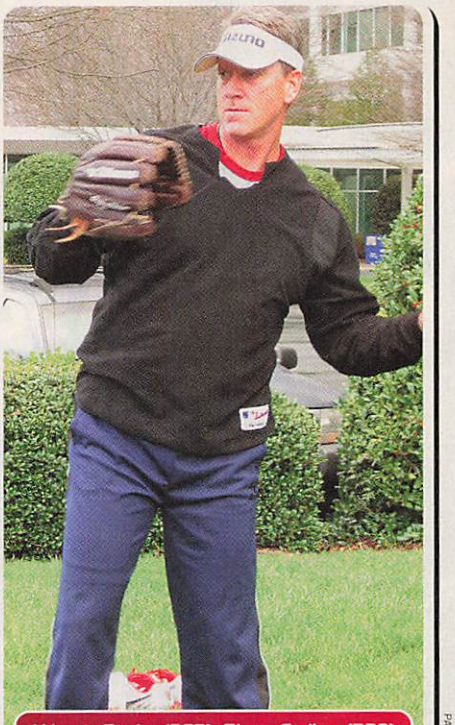
After more resistance stretches and exercises, Glavine is done for the day, three and a half hours after he began.

Because it's been a more rigorous workout, he takes the rest of the day to recover. Usually, he returns home to lift weights and work out for another couple of hours with former Braves strength and conditioning coach, Frank Fultz. Though a rehab novice, hard work is nothing new to Glavine despite the fact that when he started in baseball the joke was that: You spent all winter getting in shape so that during the season you could get out of shape.

"No one ever worked out during the season," he said. "You never touched a weight. It was all running and rotator cuff exercises. In the early '90s, the Braves brought (Fultz) in and we started a maintenance program which was something I'd thought about incorporating since I'd get so worn down by September."

Times have changed throughout the sport.

"When I first came in (baseball), it seemed like the average age when pitchers would retire was probably 32 to 35 years old," said Glavine. "Now it's probably 34 to 38. And that's the average. There are other guys who are able to go even longer, usually because they took care of themselves or they have great genetics."



Warren Spahn (363), Steve Carlton (329) and Eddie Plank (326) are the only lefthanders ever to win more games than Glavine (305).

PATTY RASMUSSEN

Glavine is encouraged that Moyer is still pitching at age 46.

"I don't know if I would want to pitch when I'm 46. I kind of doubt it," said Glavine. "But I think it's great to see someone do it."

So, will he or won't he pitch this season? And how will he feel if he can't?

Ever unflappable, Glavine said he doesn't feel a sense of urgency, even with spring training around the corner.

"I don't have to be ready at spring training," said Glavine. "I have to be ready April 5 or in that neighborhood. We don't even start playing spring games until March 1 (Feb. 25)."

In fact, Glavine said that if he doesn't think he's ready to be in the spring training environment by February 14 when pitchers and catchers report, he'd just as soon stay in Atlanta to work out.

"I know that environment, being around teammates and the media, would make me rush," he said. "And I don't want to do that."

As to how he'll feel if this rehab is unsuccessful, Glavine gives a trademark shrug.

"I'm in a no-lose situation," he said. "If I'm healthy, I'll play, and if I'm not I'll go home. Either way I'm happy. So I'm not stressing about it."

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PAINTING THE CORNERS

BY JAY BUSBEE

THE LONG VIEW ON SMOLTZ'S EXODUS

PAUL ABELL/ATLANTA BRAVES

Smoltz may be with the Red Sox, but no one will ever think of him as anything other than a Brave on loan to Boston.

I'M HAPPY FOR JOHN SMOLTZ. No, seriously, I am.

As I write this, we're less than 24 hours from the news breaking that Smoltz will pitch this year at Fenway Park, assuming he returns from injury. And there's been plenty of knee-jerk reaction, fingers pointed in every direction.

I'm not going to do any of that. What's the point? Sure, I would have loved to see Smoltz come back and lead Atlanta into October this season. I would have loved to see Smoltz retire a Brave. But I'm not going to turn my back on the team, the season or Smoltz himself because his final act didn't play out exactly as I would have scripted it.

You might recall Jerry Seinfeld's old line about fans these days rooting for "laundry", because the players wearing the uniforms change so often. That seldom seemed to apply here. Even though the Braves have had 334 players come through town since 1991, it never felt like Atlanta was a revolving door.

That's because Atlanta had stability at its heart, best represented by Smoltz himself. He had been in uniform every year since 1988 (missing all of 2000 to injury). He and Chipper Jones had the longest combined tenure of any two teammates in baseball, with 37 seasons together.

All that's over now. Maybe it's for the best, but it's still a little early to make those kind of judgments.

We don't know if Smoltz will return to the mound with his trademark heater intact. We don't know if he could have made a difference in the Braves' 2009 prospects. It's all speculation at this point, and it will be for another four to five months, at least.

My prediction? Smoltz will come back, and he'll have solid success in the American League. Barring a surprising collapse, the Red Sox will make it to the post-season. And Atlanta fans will watch him pitch – with luck, the Braves will have October opponents of their own – and we'll wonder what might have been. And if Smoltz once again has success, it'll be like ripping the scab off all over again.

But, in your columnist's humble opinion, that's the wrong perspective to take. It's the rare team-player relationship that ends well. For every Cal Ripken and Tony Gwynn, who played out their entire careers with one team, there are a hundred mercenaries, jumping from contract to contract and city to city, breaking fans' hearts as they chase ever-larger paychecks.

> "A PLAYER-TEAM RELATIONSHIP ISN'T LIKE A MARRIAGE, WHERE THERE'S AT LEAST THE EXPECTATION THAT IT'LL BE FOREVER."

Ask fans in Pittsburgh or Kansas City what it feels like to watch star after star walk out the door for nothing more than money. It hasn't happened as frequently here, and like with so many other hard realities of baseball, we thought it wouldn't happen to us in this case.

A player-team relationship isn't like a marriage, where there's at least the expectation that it'll be forever. It's almost unheard of for a team, a player, and fans to all agree when it's best for any particular player to suit up elsewhere. Somebody's almost always unhappy. The multi-millionaire player feels "disrespected," the team feels used, the fans feel abandoned.

But let's back up for a second. This time around, why not go easy on the hurt feelings? Why not put this all into perspective? Smoltz leaving now doesn't diminish anything that he did in his two decades here. He'll be an icon of Atlanta baseball for years to come, and he'll be in the Braves' record book for longer than that.

In the shorter term, let's suppose the Red Sox make it to the World Series, and let's suppose Smoltz goes to the mound for them. I can think of only one instance where I'd be rooting against him to win in October, and that would be if he's back at Turner Field. (A fella can dream.)

Now, if the Braves did manage to reach the World Series, and they somehow ended up facing Smoltz, well, first off, it'd be the story to end all World Series stories. But second, I'd hope that Atlanta knocked Smoltz out of the box in the first inning. I'd be more than okay with that.

But suppose Smoltz doesn't face Atlanta in the post-season. Suppose he does win a game or two, or even a series-clincher. Does that mean we've lost him for good? Does he suddenly become a retroactive Bostonian, like Curt Schilling and David Ortiz and Kevin Garnett (sorry for slipping in the NBA on you)?

Heck no. The guy is Atlanta, through and through. No one will ever think of him as anything other than a Brave on loan to Beantown. And should he end up at Cooperstown, he'll be wearing an Atlanta cap.

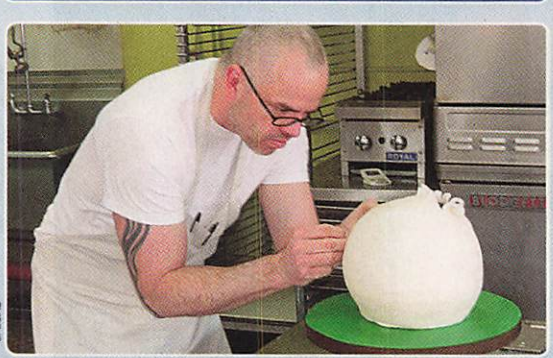
Let Smoltz go. And when he's done in Boston, welcome him back.

PARTY HEARTY!

FOR BRAVES FANS, nothing goes together quite like "The Hammer" and baseball, so Chop-Talk got a jump on Hammerin' Hank Aaron's 75th birthday celebration with the cake he's holding on this month's cover.

However, the festivities really get under way on Feb. 5, Aaron's actual birthday, when he and his wife, Billye, host 500 people, including former president Bill Clinton and Major League Baseball commissioner Bud Selig, at the Marriott Marquis in Atlanta for a gala event.

That will be followed a week later, Feb. 12, by another festive birthday party, expected to attract in the neighborhood of 1,000 in Mobile, Ala., Aaron's hometown. Tickets for this event ($75 per person) may still be available at (251) 479-2327 and hankaaronstadium.com.



SPECIAL

Matty Lewis creates the "Hammer Cake" for Hammerin' Hank Aaron.

The "hammer cake" Aaron is holding on this month's cover was created by Matty Cakes Bakery of Atlanta. Since you're probably wondering, it's Matty Lewis' red velvet cake, which has been featured in Parade magazine. Allison Shirreffs' cover photo was taken in the Ivan Allen Jr. Braves Museum, for anyone who doesn't recognize the setting.

Ten years ago, on Feb. 5, 1999, some 1,700 guests - including then-president Clinton, Selig, Ted Turner and many other big names jammed into the Hyatt Regency ballroom to help Aaron celebrate his 65th. Billye Aaron says she doesn't envision anything as big or elaborate this time, but it'll be big and memorable, just the same.

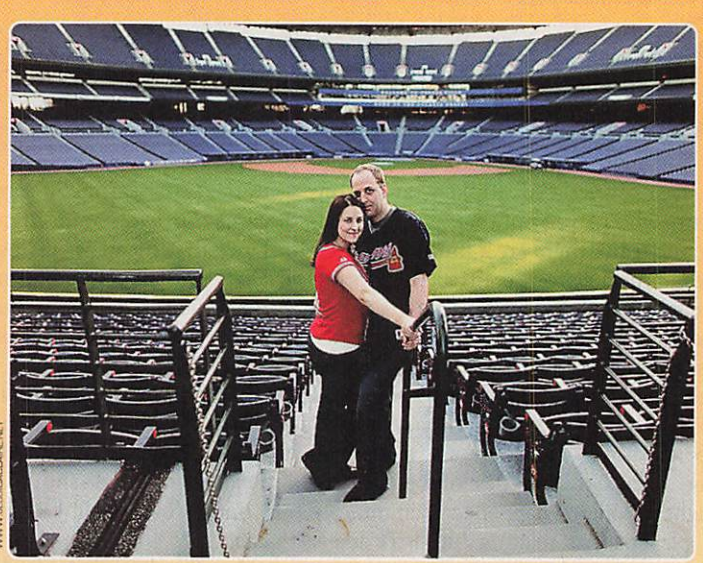
Several of Aaron's former teammates and opponents and fellow Hall of Famers, including Dusty Baker, now manager of the Reds, and Ralph Garr, a Braves scout, will be on hand, as well as Frank Robinson, who entered the Hall of Fame with Aaron in 1982.

"It'll probably be between 350 and 500 people," said Aaron's wife. "I don't want it so big that people can't move around and visit."

Officially the event is a fundraiser for the Aarons' Chasing the Dream Foundation. Tickets will be sold, but only among friends and associates of the Aarons. Many children who have benefited from the foundation also will be present, and several are expected to perform.

On Feb. 12, the Mobile BayBears are hosting Aaron and 1,000 guests at the Arthur Outlaw Convention Center. The dinner will start at 7 p.m. (Central), but bids for memorabilia, much of it Aaron items, will begin at 5:30. Proceeds benefit BayBears Charities, primarily the new Hank Aaron Museum & Learning Center that will open in April and is housed in Aaron's childhood home that's been moved to Hank Aaron Stadium.

DOUBLY DEVOTED



WWW.JESSICACLAIRE.NET

AS A SIGN of their commitment to each other, Ami Price and her husband, Scott Gilbert (L), chose to renew their marriage vows Dec. 31. While demonstrating their devotion to each other, they also decided to show their devotion to the Braves.

Price and Gilbert, who live in Chicago, chose Atlanta for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is their love for the city and the Braves' presence. So, to begin their celebration, they rented Turner Field on Dec. 30 to have a welcoming party for their 35 guests.

"My husband and I are both Braves fans, and so are my parents and siblings and my friends," said Ami, 29, who writes a wedding blog at elizabethannedesigns.com with her friend Rebekah Burder from Birmingham,

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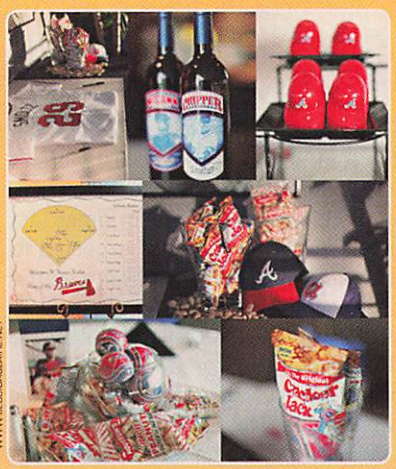

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Ala. "We grew up in Greenville (S.C.), and we both have such a passion for the Braves that we wanted to incorporate the Braves somehow."

And did they ever!

For starters, they hired Elite Transportation, the official transportation provider of the Braves, no less, to take their guests to Turner Field in a bus, complete with a Braves logo on the side. They had a series of professional photographs taken around the ballpark, took a tour of the Braves Museum and the stadium, then settled down at the 755 Club for a meal that included Skip & Pete's Hall of Fame BBQ.

Like a lot of fans, Ami, who grew up a Dale Murphy fan, and Scott, a 36-year-old accountant, don't let distance (roughly 725 miles in their case) come between them and the Braves. They subscribe to ChopTalk (of course) and usually make four weekend pilgrimages to Turner Field each season. They also catch the Braves in Chicago and nearby Milwaukee and often go to St. Louis and Cincinnati for games.

That's not all. They even take their Cockapoo, Charlie, to Turner Field for Bark in the Park!

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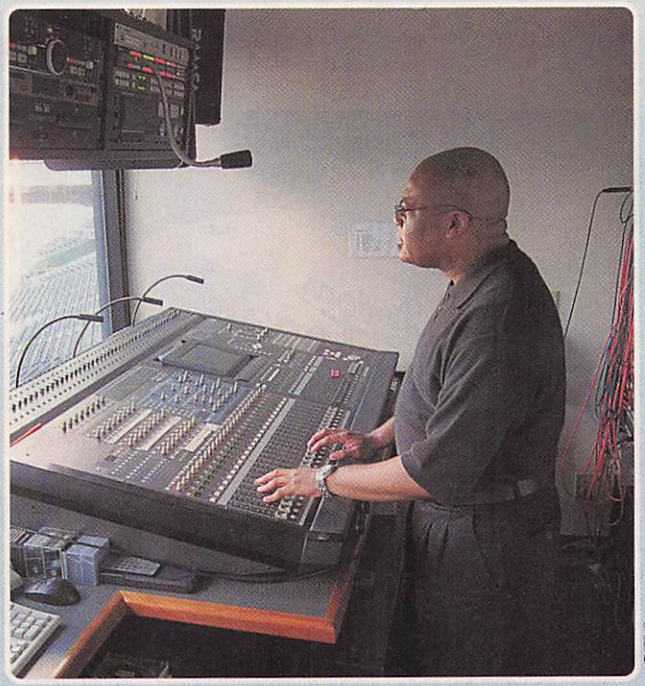
HOW DO THEY DO THAT?

PICK THE GAME DAY MUSIC



SPECIAL

WHEN THE BRAVES get a rally going and have their opponent rattled, hearing the right song just makes a good thing better.

Joseph Simmons (above), the Braves' audio operations manager/sound designer, selects all the songs played at Turner Field. He splits songs into different categories using a software-based program, so he can immediately access them all on a touch screen.

"My main goal is to embellish the excitement that's happening on the field," said Simmons, who once had his own mobile DJ service. "With the players making great plays and everything, I try to keep that energy level up and keep everybody happy and excited."

When the Braves come through with a big play, the Turner Field crowd enjoys fan-interactive songs like "Y.M.C.A." and "Rock and Roll, Part II", also known as "The Hey Song." Simmons explained that while he plays these and other songs frequently heard at most stadiums, he mixes things to keep it fresh.

"I try to always include a wide variety," said Simmons. "You can never make everybody completely happy. But I try to make as many folks happy as I possibly can with the selections."

Simmons also plays short musical "batter clips" as each Brave comes to the plate. Some players get involved and offer songs or specific genres of music they like for their batter clips. The more superstitious Braves stick to the same song if it coincides with a hot streak.

Chipper Jones' long-time batter clip started as "Crazy Train" by Ozzy Osbourne. A few years ago, a rapper named Trick Daddy did a remix take on it. Now Simmons plays a hybrid of both songs together.

- STEVE FALL

SMOLTZ OUT, LOWE AND KAWAKAMI IN

JON SOOHOO / LA DODGERS

Derek Lowe is one of the best sinkerball pitchers in baseball and was 6-1 with a 1.27 ERA in his last 10 starts of 2008.

IN LESS THAN A WEEK in mid-January, Braves pitching underwent a drastic transformation that left the staff without icon **John Smoltz** but with a pair of accomplished and durable righthanders.

With free agents **Kenshin Kawakami** (3-year contract) and **Derek Lowe** (4-year contract) added to the starting rotation via free agency, the Braves went from having a thin and relatively inexperienced starting five to having a deep group of starters that seems to stack up favorably with any in the division, if not the league.

Lowe and Kawakami join **Jair Jurrjens** and **Javier Vasquez** as the front four starters, with the fifth slot up for grabs.

The surprising chain of events began late on the night of Jan. 7 when news began to leak to the media that Smoltz was ending his 22-year association (20 in the majors) with the Braves to sign with Boston for a more lucrative deal than Atlanta offered. The news generated shock and dismay from many fans and some media, though that seemed to temper when **Frank Wren**'s plan for the rotation developed.

"Once people understood both sides and what went down, I think they started to understand and realize that for us to put a team together, we had to take the position we did," said Wren. "Boston was in a unique position of being $50 million under last year's payroll and they could afford to take a chance. I think the most-pertinent thing I said was we were willing to pay John as much or more than the Red Sox to pitch. We just weren't willing to pay him as much as the Red Sox were to not pitch."

Smoltz will turn 42 May 15. He appeared in just 6 games last season, had major shoulder surgery, and is not expected to pitch until sometime after his 42nd birthday. For more on the Smoltz story, see page 43.

Lowe, 35, is regarded as the new ace of the rebuilt rotation. He was 14-11 with a 3.24 ERA last year with the Dodgers and has won 12 or more games for the last seven seasons. His best year was 2002, when he was 21-8 with a 2.58 ERA for the Red Sox. Lifetime, he is 126-107, 3.75. Prior to 2002, he was a reliever and saved 81 games for Boston from 1999-2001. He tied for the NL lead in starts (34) last year and was ninth in innings (211). Over his last 10 starts, he was 6-1, 1.27.

Kawakami, 33, is the first Japanese player acquired by the Braves. He played 11 seasons with the Chunichi Dragons of the Japanese Central League. He was the league Rookie of the Year in 1998 and its MVP in 2004 when he was 17-7 with a 3.32 ERA and 176 strikeouts and just 38 walks in 192 1/3 innings. He also won the Japanese equivalent of the **Cy Young** Award that season, and he has 3 Gold Gloves on his resume. For his career, he is 112-72 with a 3.22 ERA and has averaged fewer than two walks per nine innings.

KRIP HOME/ATLANTA BRAVES

Kenshin Kawakami, with Frank Wren and Bobby Cox, was one of the best pitchers in Japan and has outstanding command of his pitches.

STRENGTH IN RESERVE

The Braves locked up two of their best bench players from last season when they signed **Greg Norton** to a one-year contract and **Omar Infante** to a two-year deal with a club option for 2011.

Norton, 36, came to the Braves last May in a trade with Seattle and proceeded to lead the majors with 3 pinch-hit home runs, 18 pinch RBIs and 17 pinch walks. He was second in the majors with 18 pinch hits.

Norton's 85 career pinch hits rank second among all active players. His 13 career pinch homers rank 10th all-time and are tied for second among active players. Since the start of the 2001 season, Norton's 13 pinch homers and 64 pinch RBIs lead the majors.

Infante, who could have become a free agent after the 2009 season, came to the Braves last off-season in a trade with the Cubs. The 27-year-old played 77 games at five different positions (third base, left field, shortstop, second base and center field) last year and hit .293 with 24 doubles, 3 homers and 40 RBIs. He also hit .341 with runners in scoring position.

U-S-A! U-S-A!

Chipper Jones and **Brian McCann** have accepted invitations to play for Team USA in the World Baseball Classic Mar. 5-23. The final roster of 28 players is to be set by Feb. 24. First-round games will be played in Tokyo, Mexico City, Toronto and San Juan, Puerto Rico. The 28-man U.S. squad will report to Clearwater, Fla., Mar. 2 at the Phillies' training camp to work under Team USA manager and former Brave **Dave Johnson** (2B/1B, 1973-75).

The Americans' first game in the tourna-

ment is Mar. 7 against Canada at Toronto's Rogers Centre. The U.S. will play exhibitions against the Yankees in Tampa on Mar. 3, the Blue Jays in Dunedin on Mar. 4, and the Phillies in Clearwater on Mar. 5.

The U.S. plays in Pool C with Canada, Venezuela and Italy. The four teams will compete in a six-game, double-elimination tournament, with the top two teams advancing to the second round in Miami.

The WBC has four pools consisting of 16 teams. The semi-finals are scheduled in Los Angeles on Mar. 21 and 22. The winners of those two games will play for the championship at Dodger Stadium on Mar. 23.

Former Brave **Mark DeRosa** (INF, 1998-2004), now with Cleveland, also is on the Team USA roster. **Felipe Alou** (OF/1B, 1964-69) will manage the Dominican Republic, and **Vinny Castilla** (3B/SS, 1991-92, 2002-03) will manage Mexico.

THE OL' SWITCHEROO

Just when it looked like **Rafael Furcal** was returning to the Braves, he turned around and re-signed with the Dodgers. Reports on Dec. 16 indicated the Braves and Furcal's agent, **Paul Kinzer**, reached an agreement. According to **Frank Wren**, Kinzer requested the Braves FAX him an offer sheet, essentially signaling an agreement, and the Braves did so. However, the next day Furcal signed with the Dodgers.

"I was under the impression we had a deal," said Wren. "But at the end of the day, he was back with the Dodgers."

Braves president **John Schuerholz** was so incensed by the way Furcal's representatives handled the situation that he was quoted as saying the Braves will never do business again with that agency.

SHORT HOPS

- Braves pitchers and catchers are scheduled to report to spring training at Disney's Wide World of Sports Feb. 14 and have their first workout the next day. The rest of the players report Feb. 17, and the first full workout is Feb. 18. For more on spring training, see pages 20-21.

- Prior to **John Smoltz** leaving for Boston, he and **Chipper Jones** were the longest active teammates in the majors (16 seasons). Chipper now leads the majors with the most consecutive seasons with his current team (16).

FRANK WREN
GENERAL MANAGER

OUR CLUB'S IN GOOD SHAPE AS WE PREPARE FOR CAMP

I THINK WE REALLY IMPROVED our starting pitching by signing Derek Lowe and Kenshin Kawakami. Our players feel good about it, and that's a good sign. They feel we have a good chance to win every night. That's all players can ask. That makes them sharper and more ready to play.

We had that for 14 years, where the guys felt they had a good chance to win every day. That was our off-season goal, to send that message to the players and to the fans that there's a good chance we'll win every time we go out there.

We really targeted starting pitching, and we feel we've put together a rotation that is very competitive in the division and the rest of the league. That makes going to spring training this month even more exciting for us.

Kawakami is a pitcher we followed very closely for a number of years in anticipation of him becoming a free agent. He's really a great competitor. The two things that stand out about him are his command, which is above average, and his ability to pitch inside to both right-handed and left-handed hitters.

His best pitch is his cutter. He also has a Roy Oswalt-like slow curve that drives hitters crazy. And he has a changeup and split that he uses less frequently. He also gets it up there anywhere from between 88 and 93 (miles per hour). He's got good stuff.

Lowe was high on our list coming out of our organizational meetings in October. We were very impressed with what we knew about him and how he's developed as a leader. He's a guy the young pitchers can lean on, and he enjoys that role. He got close to Greg Maddux the last few years, and he's taken on a lot of Greg's habits, as far as watching the game and video and understanding what goes on inside the game.

> "WE FEEL WE'VE PUT TOGETHER A ROTATION THAT IS VERY COMPETITIVE IN THE DIVISION AND THE REST OF THE LEAGUE."

He gives us a guy who was No. 1 for the Dodgers last year and pitched No. 1 in all their post-season series. He had an outstanding post-season, and he's durable.

Our bench became a strength last year once we acquired Greg Norton, and we think it will be again with the signing of Norton and Omar Infante. Norton and Greg Dobbs (Phillies) were the class of the league as pinch-hitters last year.

We knew Infante had a lot of versatility when we acquired him, and he has a good bat, too.

(Martin) Prado has really grown into that role, too. He can play various positions and has a good bat. Adding (David) Ross at catcher gives us a very solid defensive backup to Mac (Brian McCann) and someone with some pop in his bat.

We got those pieces put together early and added the two lefty relievers, Eric O'Flaherty and Boone Logan, and got Javier Vazquez before the winter meetings. That made it easier to concentrate on starting pitching. It's very hard to add three starters, but we were able to do it.

I think we're in good shape. As far as continuing to look for another player, if we can find the right bat, we might do something. But one of the issues about improving your pitching is that you don't want to put someone out there behind them who isn't able to handle the defensive side.

There are some outfielders available, but most have questionable defense. We want to guard against that. We might get to the point where we take a chance on someone like that, but we're not there yet.

We're 50-50 about either adding someone before camp or going to camp and taking a look at the young guys we have and then making a decision. There are a couple of outfielders who might be traded during spring training that we have interest in, and I've talked to those general managers.

HUDSONS "R" US

LIFE ON FILM PHOTOGRAPHY

Tim Hudson checks out the toys purchased by Kendall Selmer and Kayla Selmer (R)during the third annual Holidays With The Hudsons party and shopping spree.

TIM HUDSON may not be able to pitch early this season due to continued rehabilitation for elbow surgery, but he continues to show why he was the Braves' nominee for last year's **Roberto Clemente** Award for his community involvement. Hudson and his wife, **Kim**, hosted their annual Toys "R" Us shopping spree and holiday party for children from the Make-A-Wish Foundation Dec. 18 in Buckhead. There were 75 children participating, and they and their siblings each received a $50 gift card from the Hudsons. Before the toy shopping began, there was a party that included face painting and Tim reading stories to the kids. Kim was to receive a special award for her charitable work from the Braves 400 Club during its annual winter banquet Jan. 31 at the Atlanta Marriott Century Center.

SKIP & PETE

The Braves 400 Club is holding its annual winter banquet, the **Eddie Glennon** Gameboree, Jan. 31 at the Marriott Century Center located just off I-85 north at the Clairmont Rd. exit. The theme is "Honoring **Pete Van Wieren** and Remembering **Skip Caray**." Current and former Braves broadcasters were invited, as well as players and former players.

Awards to be given out include: **Tommy Hanson** - **Phil Niekro** Award to the Braves' minor league pitcher of the year; **Freddie Freeman** - **Hank Aaron** Award to the Braves' minor league hitter of the year; **Matt Young** - **Bill Lucas** Award to the Braves' minor leaguer who best represents the organization on and off the field; and **Phillip Wellman** to the Braves' minor league manager of the year.

Tickets are $65 each. Call (770) 416-4539 or visit braves400.org for information or tickets.

OPEN HOUSE

The Braves will host a free Open House at Turner Field on Saturday, Mar. 28, featuring alumni autograph sessions, autographed item giveaways, tours of the stadium and Braves Museum and Hall of Fame, a "Select-a-Seat" event, and much more. There will be an opportunity to win autographed items and prizes throughout the day.

Among other things, fans can find their choice of seats for the coming season. Ticket offers include the "Buy 2 Full Season Tickets, Get 2 Free" in the Golden Moon Casino Pavilion, Field Reserved, and Terrace Reserved sections and the $249 full season ticket package. Other specials include two Braves "Six Game Ticket Packs" featuring games against the Yankees and Boston Red Sox starting as low $81. For more ticket package information, visit braves.com/tickets or call (404) 577-9100.

CARAVAN!

Braves players, coaches, broadcasters and executives will meet fans and sign autographs in six cities around the Southeast as a part of the Atlanta Braves Community Caravan Jan. 27-31. Participants had not been announced at press time. Caravan stops are scheduled at Academy Sports + Outdoors in Macon, Ga. (Jan. 27 at 4:30 p.m.), Birmingham, Ala. (Jan. 28 at 4:30 p.m.), Auburn, Ala. (Jan. 29 at 4:30 p.m.), Spartanburg, S.C. (Jan. 30 at 4:30 p.m.), Augusta, Ga. (Jan. 31 at 1 p.m.) and Athens, Ga. (Jan. 31 at 1 p.m.).

DOUBLEHEADER

The Braves Foundation held its inaugural Diamond Gala, a night of casino games and entertainment, on Jan. 23, and followed that the next day with AutographFest at Turner Field's 755 Club. Both events benefited the charitable Atlanta Braves Foundation. The Diamond Gala was held at the InterContinental Hotel and included players, coaches and former players. A limited number of AutographFest tickets was sold for each player in order to eliminate long lines.

WHEN IN ROME...

Brian McCann was scheduled to be the featured guest at the Seventh Annual Hot Stove Gathering at The Forum in downtown Rome, Ga., on Jan. 26 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Other guests from the Atlanta Braves organization were expected, and the Rome Braves field staff for the coming season was to be introduced. Proceeds benefit Cancer Navigators in memory of **Jim Beauchamp**, a former Braves player and coach who passed away in 2007 after a long battle with leukemia. Cancer Navigators is a Rome-based patient advocacy organization providing access to important resources that touch all levels of the healing experience. Visit romebraves.com.

MURPHY'S LAW

Once again, **Dale Murphy** (OF/1B/C, 1976-90) fell far short of election to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in results that were announced Jan. 12. Murphy received 62 votes or 11.5 percent of the 539 ballots cast. Only **Rickey Henderson** and **Jim Rice** were elected by veteran members of the Baseball Writers Association of America. At least 405 votes (75 percent) were required for election. This was Murphy's 10th year on the ballot. His percentage slipped slightly from last year (13.8). He's never received more than 23.2 percent, and that came in 2000, his second year on the ballot.

FREE TOURS

To encourage children to learn about the many achievements of African Americans in baseball, children 13 and under who read a book about the Negro Leagues, Hank Aaron, Jackie Robinson, or any African American contributors to the sport, will receive complimentary admission to the Braves Museum and a free tour of Turner Field from Feb. 1-28. Students can bring in the book they read or a note with the name and author of the book from their teacher or librarian on school letterhead, Monday-Saturday during Black History Month.

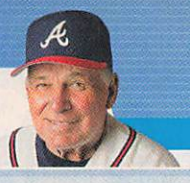
BALLS & STRIKES

- **Jeff Francoeur** was in Charleston, S.C., on Jan. 13 to participate in a fundraiser for the Lowcountry Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He took part in a $500 per couple reception cruise in Charleston Harbor aboard the Spirit of the Lowcountry.

- **Len Barker** (RHP, 1983-85) is scheduled to appear at the Joshua and Tyler Yoder Scholarship Foundation dinner and auction Mar. 6 at Signature of Solon country club in Cleveland, Ohio, where **Hank Aaron** (OF/1B, 1954-74) will be the keynote speaker. For more information, visit yoderbrothersfoundation.org or call (440) 543-2811 or e-mail tjmeno@aol.com.

- Long-time Braves minor league coach **Bill Fischer** received the **Roland Hemond** Award from Baseball America for contributions to scouting and player development.

BOBBY COX



MANAGER

ADDING THREE STARTERS IS A TREMENDOUS BOOST

I WOULD CHARACTERIZE our off-season as good. We got off to a kind of bumpy start, but it's turned out to be a prosperous winter for us.

One of our missions this winter was to secure our starting rotation after having so many injuries last year. Frank Wren's goal was to get at least two solid veteran guys to fill that role, and we've been able to accomplish that. We've added three starting pitchers, and that's hard to do. I think the additions of Javier Vazquez, Kenshin Kawakami and Derek Lowe are excellent.

I don't know Kenshin Kawakami much, except through watching video, but I know that he's been a star in his own country. He's polished and seems to know exactly what he's doing on that mound. I look forward to seeing him pitch live.

The number-one area that had to be addressed was the pitching rotation, and it was. I'm confident with the experienced guys we've got out there. It allows some of the young pitchers to continue getting their feet wet. There will be a number of pitchers vying for the fifth spot. Jorge Campillo did a good job last year. So did Buddy Carlyle, and Charlie Morton and Jo-Jo Reyes. Even Tom Glavine could factor into the mix.

We should have all our late relievers and closers back for the beginning of the season - Rafael Soriano, Mike Gonzalez and Peter Moylan. If they're all healthy, we're in good shape.

We're way ahead of the game right now, and I don't think the shopping is over. Hopefully, we'll improve the club even more. If there was a piece missing, I'd say it's another bat.

> "WE'RE WAY AHEAD OF THE GAME RIGHT NOW, AND I DON'T THINK THE SHOPPING IS OVER."

Frank's been looking for another hitter, maybe in the outfield, all winter long. But trades are made all the time. We don't have to get someone between now and spring training. There's still plenty of time to put a team together. We got Kenny Lofton at the end of spring training (1997). I don't feel any pressure to make a trade or pick someone up.

Sometimes it takes a while to get a free agent. There are always six to eight teams bidding on somebody - at least that many. Only one team is going to get the guy. There will be six or seven disappointed organizations. It happened to us, and it's happened to other teams this off-season. That's the way the business works.

Sometimes there are aspects to a deal that have nothing to do with baseball that keep a guy from deciding in favor of your club. In the case of A.J. Burnett, his wife doesn't fly, and they lived close enough to New York to make that a better fit for his family. You have to do the right thing for your family sometimes, too.

We feel we have some very exciting young talent coming in the next few years. We've all heard about Tommy Hanson, and the people who've seen him pitch are raving about him. He's rated about as high as you can rate a player, so we have him on the horizon and some young hitters on the up and coming.

We hated to lose John Smoltz. It's hard to lose a guy that's been with you for so long and who meant so much to the club, but we lost Tom Glavine and we lost Greg Maddux. Not everyone stays with their same team any more. And it's not just nowadays, though it's certainly more prevalent now.

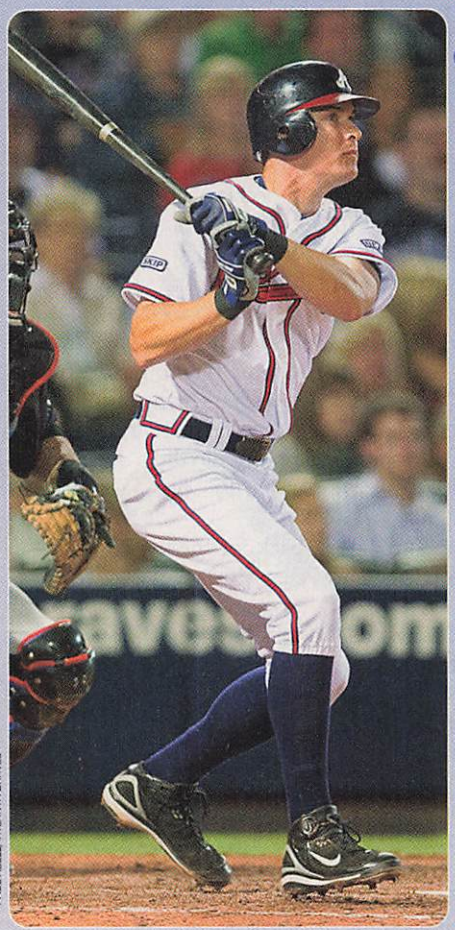
It has happened throughout baseball history. Guys like Willie Mays and Hank Aaron didn't finish with their original teams.

With Smoltz, it's hard to get over because he was so popular, not just with the fans but with his teammates, too. He was an icon in this city and community. I just hope John doesn't stay gone too long and returns to the Braves as a motivator in spring training and things like that.

Personally, I talked to John a lot. But everything fell into place for him, and he had to make a decision. But the game goes on.

PLAYING PEPPER

KELLY JOHNSON



PAUL ABELL/ ATLANTA BRAVES

Johnson led the Braves in triples (6) last year, was second in doubles (39) and third in total bases (244).

INTERVIEW BY
PATTY RASMUSSEN

Q: You and (wife) Lauren enjoyed that two-week trip to Italy in October. Did it make you want to go back to Europe?

A: Traveling like that definitely makes us both want to do more. And being gone for two weeks made us appreciate being home, too! We'd love to sneak in another trip before we head to spring training. Not to Europe, something closer to home. I think we really lucked out getting to take a trip like that while we are young.

Q: What did you like the most in Italy?

A: It was all great, but while we were there, I probably enjoyed when we were in Sienna. We rented a car and drove all over the Tuscan region, all over the hills. It was fun to drive there. But looking back, once we got home, I probably enjoyed Rome and Venice the most. We were in Rome at the end of the trip, Venice at the very start of the trip. Venice is a really cool city, and Rome had the least amount of stress, because everything is out there. There are museums and things like that, but many of the sites you want to see are just outdoors.

Q: You got married last January, so this was the first year Lauren was with you the whole season. How did that affect you during the season?

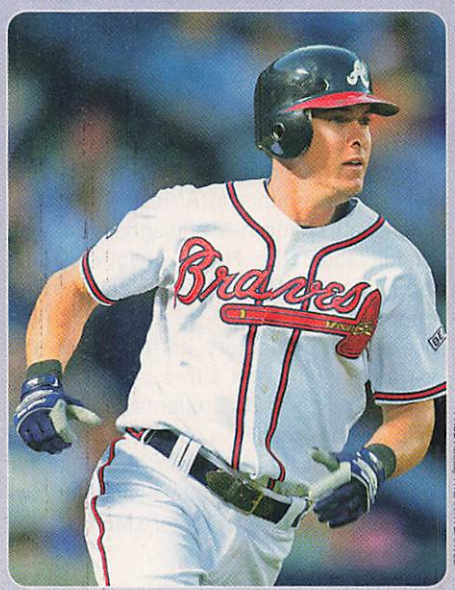
A: I don't think it affected me at all, except that everything changed for the better. It was nice to have her there all the time. She traveled to a lot of the cities with me. There are so many cool cities, and we were able to explore them together. That was definitely by design, since it won't be easy to do that later on when children are added to the mix. But like everyone else in their first year of marriage, you develop a routine, and it's great because Lauren makes it all easy. I hope I make it easy for her, too, because the baseball schedule and life can be difficult at times.

Q: Lauren went to her first University of Texas vs. Texas A&M game in November. That must have been interesting!

A: Yeah, it's our big rivalry, and it's usually held the morning after Thanksgiving. But this season it was held on Thanksgiving night. My brother had some friends who had some tickets, so we lucked into them. Then he had some friends who had a suite, and they had another suite pass, so we lucked into that. The group that was in the suite was a bunch of Texas oil people, so they were in the Wranglers (jeans) and cowboy boots. A lot of these people wear chaps and cowboy hats to the game. There were a lot of burnt orange handkerchiefs being waved around. She said, "This is the most Texas thing I've ever seen." The people in the suite were talking to her about Austin (Johnson's hometown). It was like a mini-recruiting trip! The crowd was probably 90 percent University of Texas fans, and the other 10 percent was A&M fans. So, there was a lot of burnt orange.

Q: Do you start getting antsy for the beginning of baseball once the holidays are over?

A: Definitely. It always happens right after the New Year. You're itchy to get back. You start caring more about hitting and throwing and doing baseball stuff rather than lifting and working out.



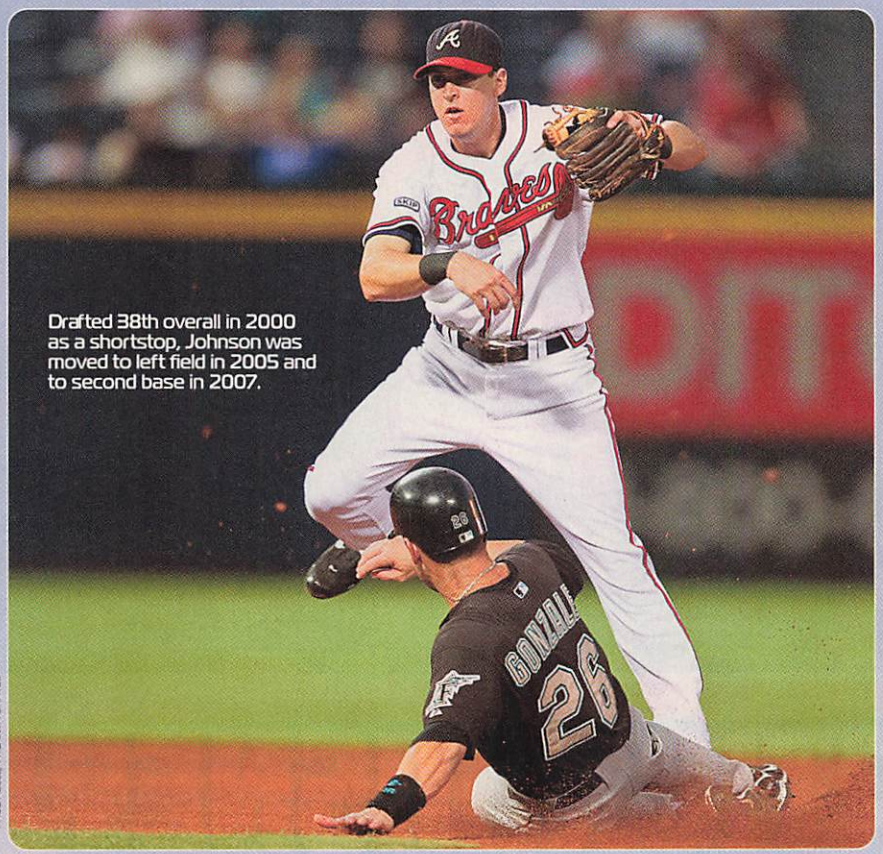
PAUL ABELL/ ATLANTA BRAVES

Q: How long did you take off once the season ended?

A: I took off most of October, then during the last week of October and the beginning of November, I started hitting it pretty hard, working out four days a week with the personal trainer. In December and January, I started going to the stadium for hitting, and then I go to the trainer, so I'm driving all over Atlanta at that point!

Q: When did you start working with a trainer?

A: I started working out with this guy about three years ago. He was working with Blaine Boyer at the time, and he proactively called me and I gave it a shot. I really liked him and when I was making the



Drafted 38th overall in 2000 as a shortstop, Johnson was moved to left field in 2005 and to second base in 2007.

PAUL ABELL/ATLANTA BRAVES

PAUL ABELL/ATLANTA BRAVES

position switch (from outfield to second base) he really helped me get ready for that. The gym where he works is located in Woodstock (northwest Atlanta suburb), and a bunch of other major league players also work out there. Some days you can get up a pretty big group of professional players. They work with college guys, too.

Q: What do you do with your trainer?

A: It's mostly lifting weights and running there. They have a batting cage, but if I'm going to hit, I'd rather have Glenn Hubbard or Chino Cadahia working with me. I just do my hitting at the stadium. At this point (mid-January), any time I go to the stadium, you'll find one of the coaches there to work with you. Right now most of the other players in town are working out at their own places, but in a few weeks they'll all be at Turner Field working out.

Q: In September, you were hitting very well - a 22-game hitting steak. Do you think that's going to carry over?

A: Well, I hope it carries over! I felt really good at the end of the season, and I'll put it this way, I hope to continue the momentum into this season. The off-season is going well. I'm not sure why, but this off-season seems more relaxed than last year which really flew by.

Q: Maybe the fact that you were getting married had something to do with it flying by?

A: Oh yeah, I'm sure that was it!

Q: This is the time of year when every baseball fan is an optimist. Is that true of you, too? What are you looking forward to seeing the Braves do this season?

A: I'm definitely an optimist. I think most guys make a sort of New Year's resolution and are trying to make good on something. They want to get better or improve in some way. That's what we all try to do. At one point in the off-season, I was the third oldest position player on the Braves, and I'm only 26 years old (27 Feb. 22). Though that changed once we signed Greg Norton and David Ross. I think we're still a very young team, but we have so much potential. There are other young teams out there like the Braves that are capable of surprises. You're always going to have guys who have those "surprise" years, and you're always going to do better with a positive, optimistic attitude. No one expected the Tampa Bay Rays to be in it last season. I'm excited to see what Kenshin Kawakami brings to our team. I know there will be more media in the clubhouse!

> **"I'M DEFINITELY AN OPTIMIST... I THINK WE'RE STILL A VERY YOUNG TEAM, BUT WE HAVE SO MUCH POTENTIAL."**

The Braves will play 18 games at Disney's Wide World of Sports, where last year they drew 138,811 fans to Champion Stadium, the second highest total in the Grapefruit League.

DISNEY

DESTINATION: DISNEY

Cox, Chipper and McCann Lead Team Into What Shapes Up As a Challenging Spring Training

BY GARY CARUSO

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, IT'S HERE.

What shapes up as the most challenging spring training the Braves have faced in years opens Feb. 14 when pitchers and catchers are scheduled to report to Disney's Wide World of Sports just outside Orlando, Fla. Pitchers and catchers have their first workout the following day, and the remainder of the squad is scheduled to report Feb. 17 for the first full workout Feb. 18.

John Smoltz is gone, but Derek Lowe, Kenshin Kawakami and Javier Vasquez have arrived to give the Braves the makings of a solid, and possibly even spectacular starting rotation. At press time, the Braves still appeared to be in need of a power hitter, but perhaps that issue will be solved by the time the team gets to its 12th spring training at Disney.

Lowe (14-11, 3.24 ERA with the Dodgers last year), Kawakami (two-time winner of the Japanese version of the Cy Young), Vasquez and Jair Jurrjens give the Braves a formidable front four, leaving a group led by top prospect Tommy Hanson (MVP of the Arizona Fall League) and possibly rehabbing free agent Tom Glavine to battle for the fifth slot.

There's plenty of other good news, too. The National League batting champ is at third base, the other three infield spots are manned by three of the league's best young players at those positions, there's an All-Star and Silver Slugger winner at catcher, and the bullpen has the potential to be spectacular.

The defending World Champion Phillies and the Mets undoubtedly will be favored to compete head-to-head for the division title, but with just regular improvement from their talented young players, the Braves could put themselves quickly into the position of spoilers.

Remember, Opening Day isn't until Sunday, April 5 in Philadelphia (8:05 p.m., ESPN2), and there's no rule that says a team has to have its season-opening roster settled by Mar. 1 or even April 1.

Many fans will recall that John Schuerholz proved its never too late to make a pre-season deal when he sprung a couple of surprises in 1997 as camp was breaking, acquiring outfielder Kenny Lofton and lefty reliever Alan Embree Mar. 25 and outfielder Michael Tucker and second baseman Keith Lockhart two days later. All four played significant roles in the Braves winning 101 games and a sixth straight division title.

Bobby Cox and hitting coach Terry Pendleton are back as links to the streak of 14 straight division titles that began in 1991.

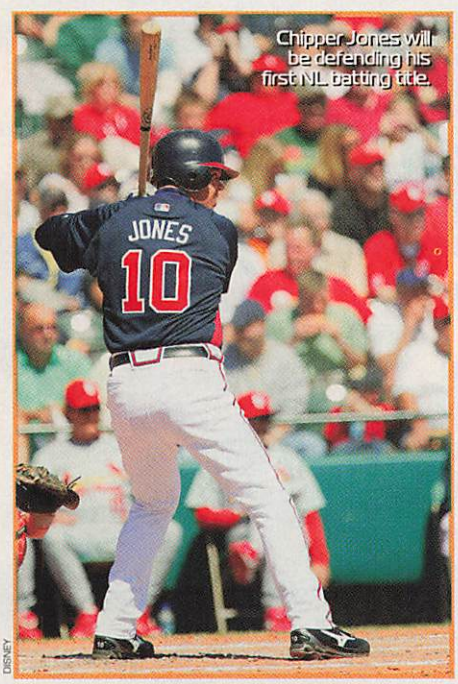
Cox, 67, is beginning his 24th season as Braves manager (1978-81, mid-1990-present) and 28th as a major league manager. The franchise's all-time winningest manager, he ranks fourth in history with 2,327 victories, trailing only Hall of Famers Connie Mack and John McGraw and St. Louis manager Tony La Russa (2,461).

The Braves will be trying to bounce back from their worst season since 1990. They finished fourth in the NL East last year with a 72-90 record (.444), 20 games behind the Phillies.

With Smoltz in Boston, Glavine in rehab, Tim Hudson recovering from elbow surgery and not expected back until late in the year, and Mike Hampton in Houston, the Braves needed starters, and Frank Wren went out and got them. Jorge Campillo and youngsters such as Charlie Morton, Jo-Jo Reyes and James Parr provide plenty of depth, too.

Left field and center field are unsettled. Matt Diaz, who missed most of last year with a knee injury, will compete for time in left with Gregor Blanco, who made good progress last year as a rookie, and Brandon Jones. Speedy Josh Anderson, who has just 61 games of big league experience and Blanco will compete for the job in center field, perhaps with minor league prospect Jordan Schafer adding to the mix.

The rest of the lineup is set. Casey Kotchman, acquired from the Angels for Mark Teixeira at the July 31 trading deadline last year, is at first base. Only 26 years old, he'll be looking to show that his lackluster .237 average in 43 games with the Braves is not a true indication of the potential he showed in the American League, where he batted .274 in parts of five seasons before the trade.



Chipper Jones will be defending his first NL batting title.

DISNEY

Kelly Johnson at second base and Yunel Escobar at shortstop give the Braves one of the best young doubleplay combinations in the league. Johnson, 27, finished last season on a tear, using a 22-game hitting streak to wind up at .287. Escobar, 26, was slowed by late-season injuries but batted .288.

At third base, Chipper Jones, though approaching his 37th birthday (April 24), is coming off one of his finest seasons and his first batting title. He hit .364 to set a National League season record for a switch-hitter.

In three full season in the majors, catcher Brian McCann, 25, has made the NL All-Star team three times, and he won his second Silver Slugger last year when he hit .301 with 23 home runs, 87 RBIs and 42 doubles.

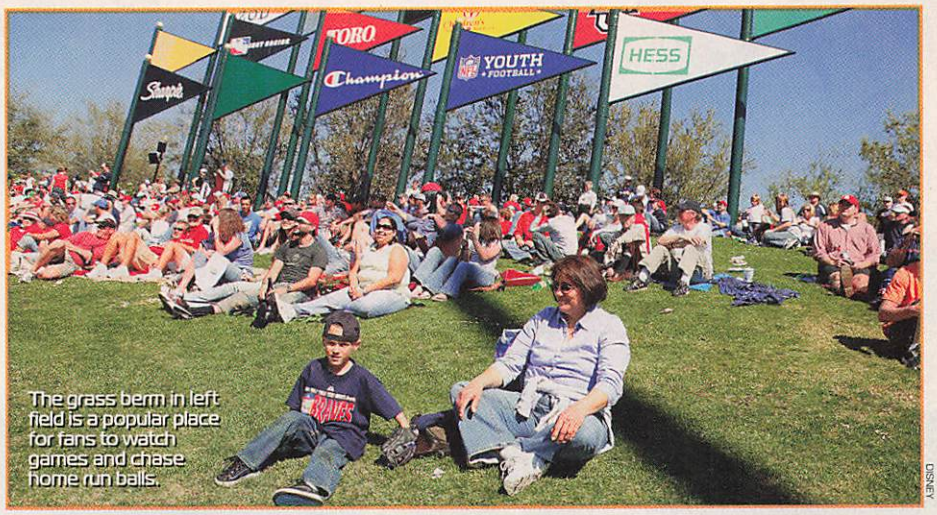
A big key to the season will be rightfielder Jeff Francoeur's attempt to bounce back from a deep funk that saw him hit just .239 with 11 home runs. Still just 25, he entered last year as a .280 career hitter who averaged 24 homers in his first two full seasons.

The bullpen is anchored by lefty closer Mike Gonzalez and righty Rafael Soriano, who was the closer to open last season but appeared in just 14 games before undergoing nerve transposition surgery to relieve elbow pain. He's expected to be full strength.

Also expected back early in the year is Australian sidewinder Peter Moylan, who is recovering from elbow surgery but should be a prime setup man.

Atlanta trains at Disney's Wide World of Sports complex, a 220-acre facility that opened in 1997 in Lake Buena Vista, Fla. Games are played in 9,500-seat Champion Stadium. After a week and a half of workouts, the Braves play 33 exhibition games in Florida, 18 of them at Disney, followed by two exhibitions (April 3-4) at Turner Field against Detroit.

The schedule at Disney is highlighted by two games against the Yankees, Mets and Phillies, one visit by the Red Sox, and World Baseball Classic exhibitions against Panama and Venezuela. See page 50 for the complete spring training schedule and ticket information.



The grass berm in left field is a popular place for fans to watch games and chase home run balls.

DISNEY

KEY DATES

JAN. 30 – FEB. 7
Pitchers' Early Throwing @ Turner Field

FEB. 14
Pitchers & Catchers Report To Disney

FEB. 15
First Workout, Pitchers & Catchers

FEB. 17
Rest Of Players Report To Disney

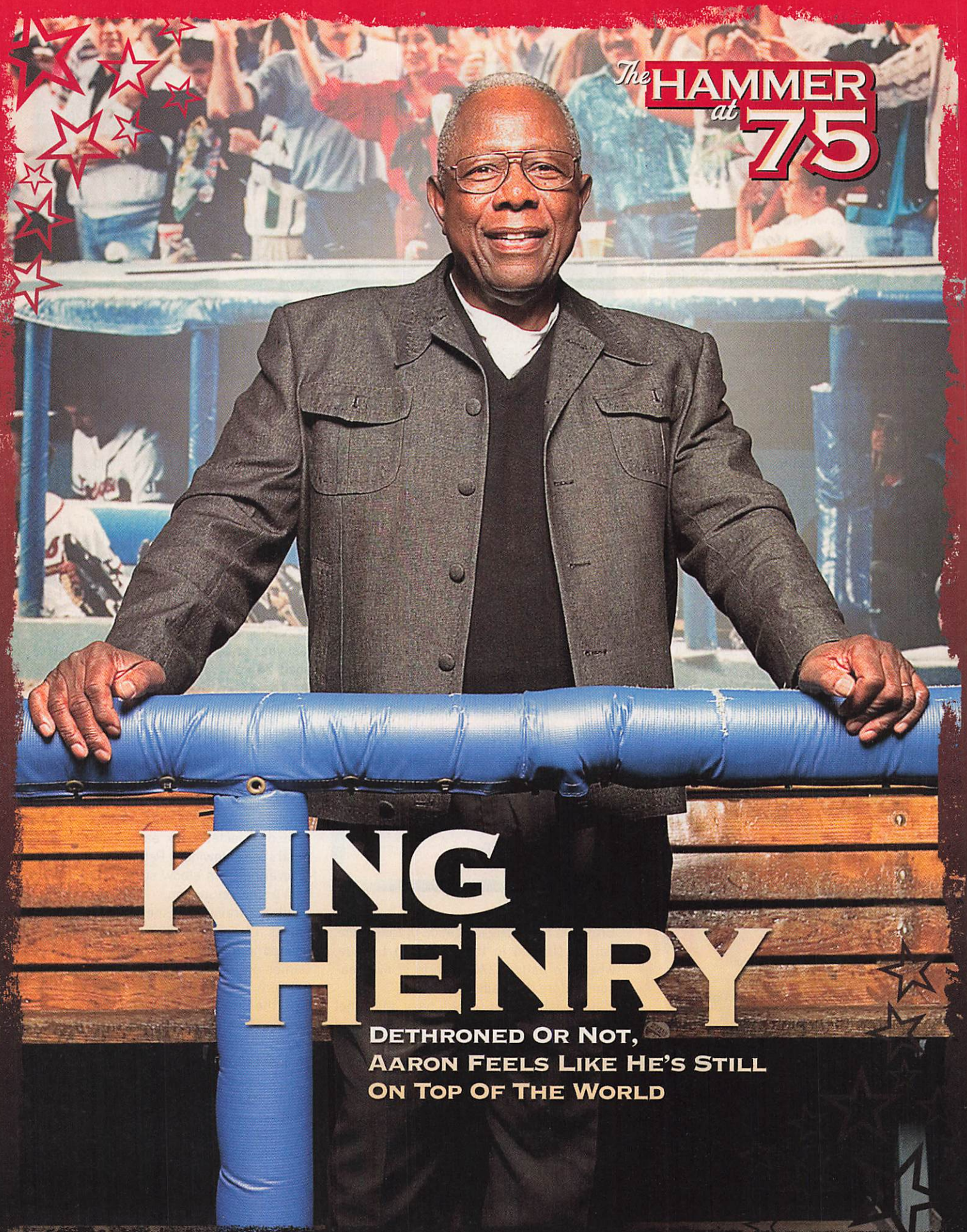
FEB. 18
First Full Squad Workout

FEB. 25
First Exhibition Game
Detroit @ Lakeland

FEB. 26
Home Exhibition Opener
Houston @ Disney

APRIL 5
Season Opener
@ Philadelphia

APRIL 10
Home Opener
Washington @ Turner Field



The HAMMER at 75

KING HENRY

Dethroned Or Not, Aaron Feels Like He's Still On Top Of The World

BY BRIAN LEE

AS THE DIAMOND anniversary of his birth approaches on February 5, legend of the baseball diamond Hank Aaron is still making a difference in people's lives.

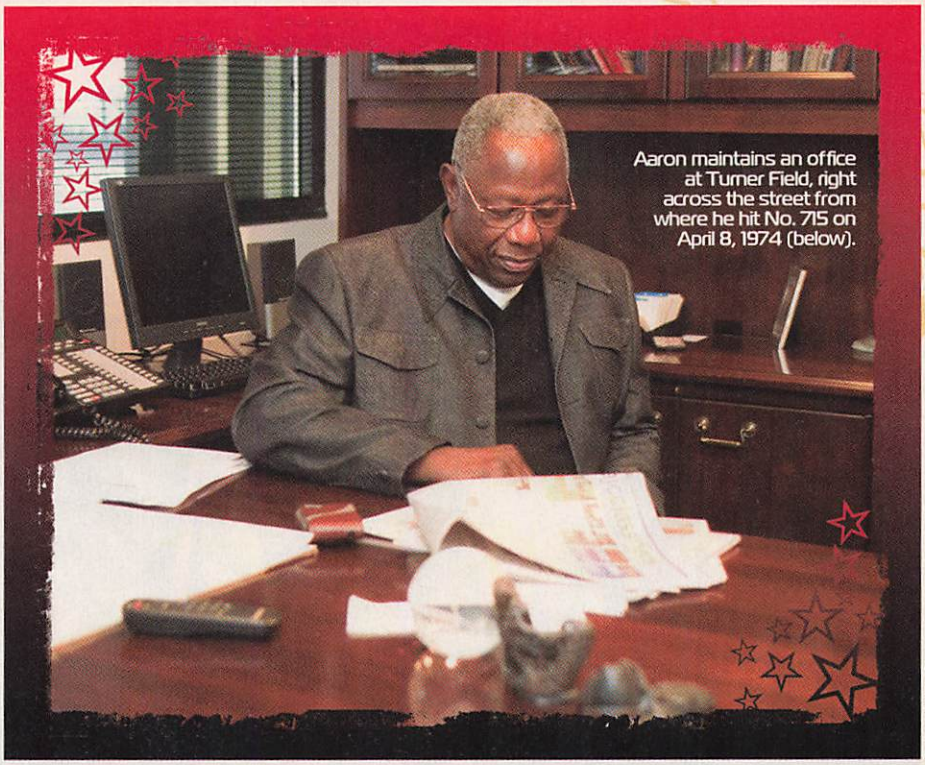
The old Hall of Famer and new great grandfather finds his bases — family, business and charity — loaded with promise and fulfillment. Tirelessly giving his time and resources to others in his gentle and genuine way, Aaron also knows that it's important to pause occasionally on his purposeful path and smell the roses.

So how's the view at age 75, Mr. 755?

"I feel good. I don't have any problems at all," said Aaron, despite his wife Billye mentioning he has some sporadic knee pain that required arthroscopic surgery in 2007. "I try to work out everyday when I'm not traveling."

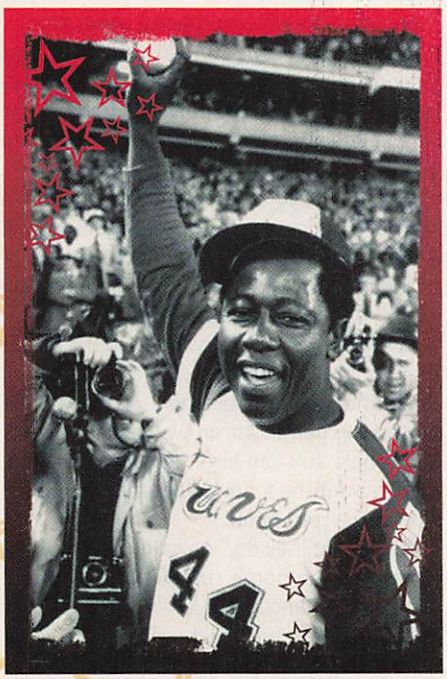
Aaron still maintains a busy travel schedule, whether it's to his and his wife's second home in West Palm Beach, Fla., or on their annual vacation cruise, or as a Major League Baseball dignitary, which includes presenting the Hank Aaron Award to the top hitter in each league every fall during the World Series. Two trips to Mobile, Alabama, Aaron's hometown, are on the upcoming schedule.

The April opening of The Hank Aaron Museum and Learning Center will be a highlight of the Mobile BayBears' plans to honor the baseball legend. The museum is actually Aaron's childhood home, which was moved to Hank Aaron Stadium, home of the BayBears, the Double-A affiliate of the Arizona Diamondbacks, and is being restored and renovated.



Aaron maintains an office at Turner Field, right across the street from where he hit No. 715 on April 8, 1974 (below).

ALLISON SHIRREFFS



ATLANTA BRAVES

ALLISON SHIRREFFS

"The project in Mobile is very exciting," said Billye Aaron, who's been married to Hank for 35 years. "It's really quite a tribute to what he has accomplished under very trying circumstances. It's almost as if things just eventually fall into place. We go through all these trials and tribulations, and you think at some point that life has thrown a hardball at you, but it all comes together. We're so proud of what they're doing with his family home. We wondered if it could even be moved!"

Aaron is certainly honored by the gesture and enthusiastic about the house's future preservation and use, but admits a wistful feeling when thinking of the location of so many fond early memories.

"It's kind of touching really when you see the home that you were born in, raised in and have all of your track records in, moving down the highway," he said in his Turner Field office. "At one time, there was a lot of traffic through that house. My mother was there baking cakes... My mother and father, who are both deceased now, were there in that house sitting on an acre of land that my father bought for $200."

The official Mobile celebration of Aaron's 75th birthday begins with a gala honoring the city's native son on Thursday, Feb. 12, at the Arthur Outlaw Convention Center in Mobile. Tickets are $75 per person at hankaaronstadium.com. The dinner benefiting BayBears Charities will include a silent auction of Aaron memorabilia, with the bulk of the proceeds going to the museum. Current Diamondbacks third baseman Mark Reynolds and rightfielder Justin Upton, as well as San Diego Padre and 2007 Cy Young Award winner Jake Peavy - all former BayBears - will be in attendance.

"This is extra special, because it's Hank, because it's his 75th birthday and because of what he not only means to this team but to this city," said Mike Callahan, BayBears assistant general manager and curator of the Hank Aaron Museum and Learning Center. "The BayBears will wear a commemorative logo all year as we'll be celebrating 75 years of Hank Aaron."

A new exhibit opening in April at the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., will feature Aaron. It will chronicle his pre-big league career, his chase of Babe Ruth's home run record, and his philanthropic work after his playing days.

A savvy businessman, Aaron remains in

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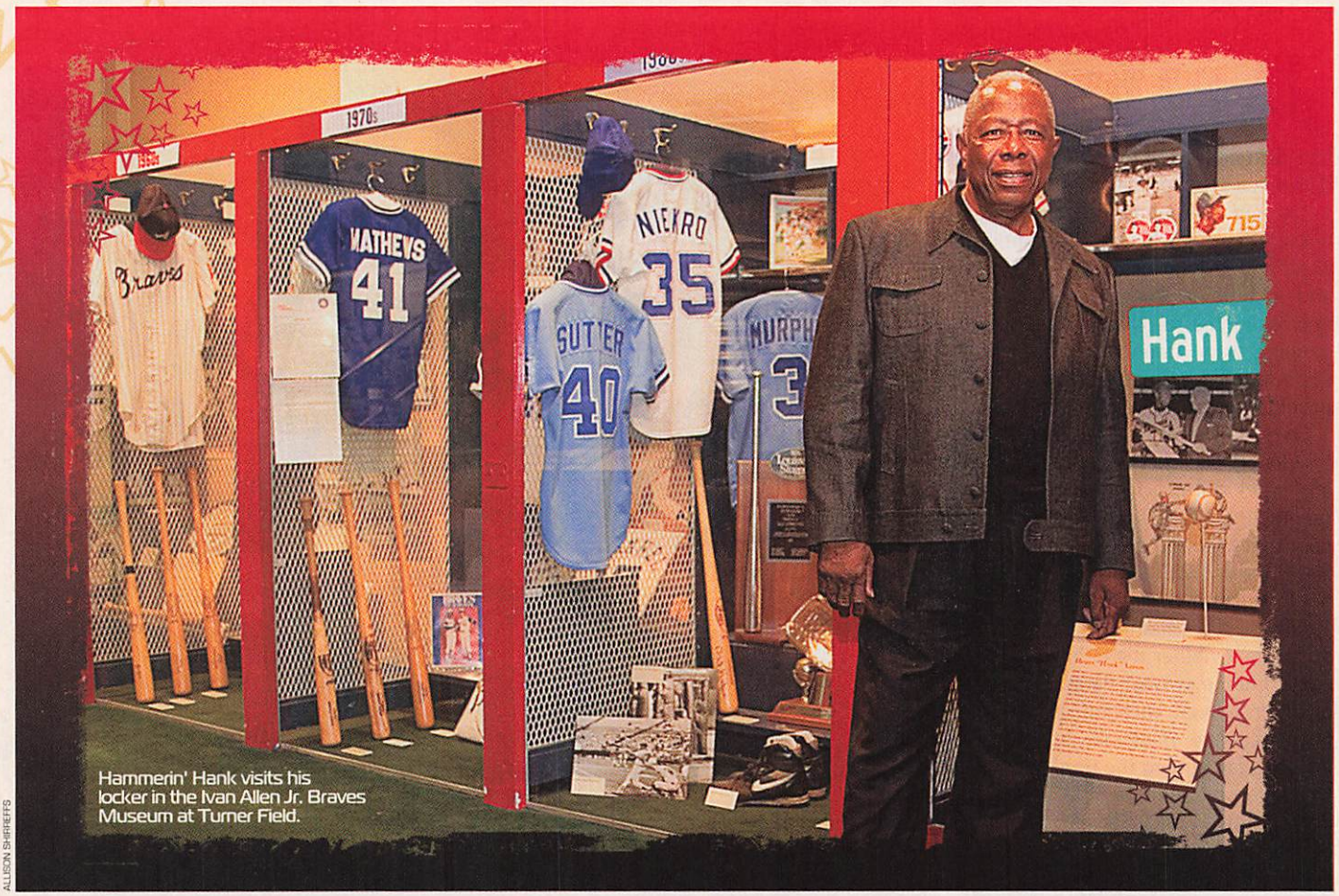


Hammerin' Hank visits his locker in the Ivan Allen Jr. Braves Museum at Turner Field.

ALLISON SHIRREFFS

his position as Braves senior vice president and also serves on the team's board of directors, but has pared down other business dealings a little in the past couple of years.

"I don't want to use the word 'retired,'" said Aaron. "Let's just say I've slowed down a little bit."

The Braves legend remains in the restaurant business with his 755 Corporation owning 25 Popeyes and Church's Chicken restaurants in Georgia, N. Carolina and S. Carolina. Aaron's children and son-in-law, Victor Haydel, manage the fast-food restaurant properties. Aaron has disposed of his automobile dealership holdings in the past two years, though.

"I was fortunate to get out just before the crash came," he said. "After seven years, I said, 'Hey, I had 23 years of baseball. I'm not going to have 23 years in the automobile business.' It was good. I've been very lucky in business because of the way I looked at it.

"I looked at business the same way I looked at playing baseball. I tackled it as a job, as something that needed my undivided attention, and did the right thing. So, that's the way I went at it. I didn't go in there to make a lot of money, although I did make a lot of money, but I'm still very satisfied at how things came out."

Said Billye Aaron, "Sometimes it feels like he's retired, and sometimes it doesn't. We don't think retirement means you're supposed to stay home and not help where you can."

Aaron seemingly has always extended a helping hand to the community. The Hank Aaron Chasing The Dream Foundation has two branches, the original founded in 1994, and a more recent version, started in 2007 and funded by MLB and managed by the Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

The foundation helps children from 9 to 12 years old pursue their goals in science, literature, dance, art, sports and other fields with annual grants up to $2,500. Aaron described the status of the foundation as "excellent" and that it has far surpassed the original mission of helping 755 children.

"So now we just continue to grow, to grow, and to grow," he said. "It's done well. We've been very lucky. The toughest thing that we have right now is finding the kids to sponsor. We have money to invest, but we could always use more money. It's a different type of foundation. We don't give big stipends like $15,000 or $16,000. We try to help kids chase their dreams. For example, if a kid wants to be helped with his piano lessons, we try to help him. If a kid wants help with harp or playing in the band, or he or she needs an instrument, we try to help facilitate that."

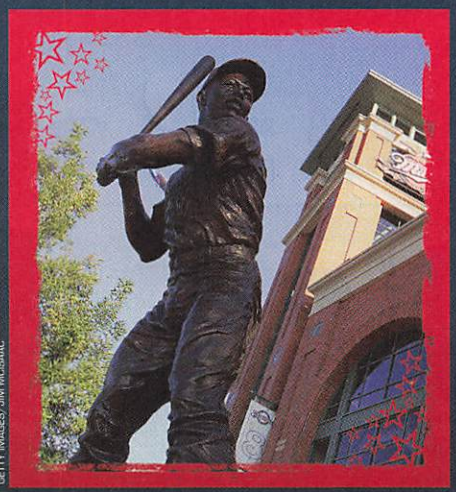
Like a hitting streak can give way to a slump, or vice versa, times change fast. Aaron, who has five children and eight grandchildren, welcomed a new generation - his first great grandchild - in December.

Two things that remain permanent though are Hammerin' Hank's peace of mind and fans' appreciation for the way he played the game. Aaron was asked recently if people still call him the home run king, even though he's now officially second (by 7) in the record book.

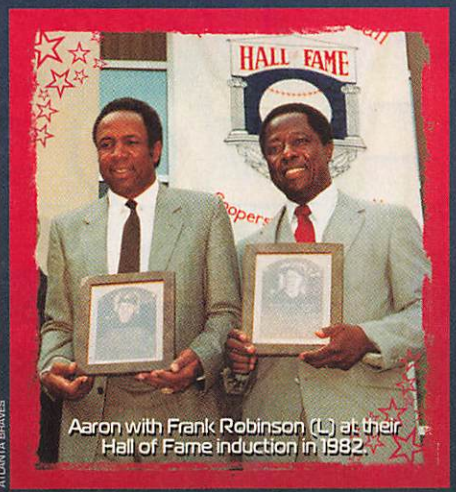
"Oh, yeah, they do," he said. "If they want to call me the home run king, that's fine. I can't do anything about it. My career is over and done with, and I did everything I could when I was on the baseball field."

755 HOME RUNS
AND A WHOLE LOT MORE

(THE FOLLOWING IS OFFERED ONLY AS A SAMPLING, NOT A COMPLETE LIST)

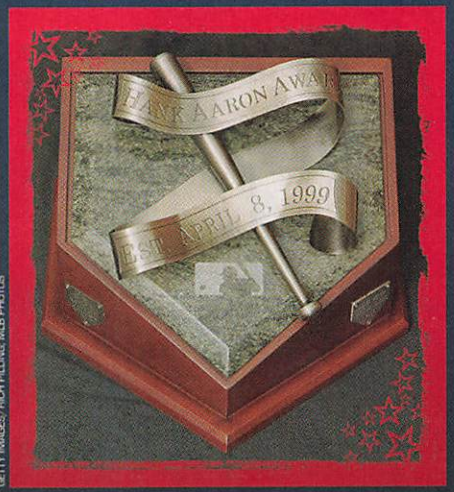


GETTY IMAGES/ JIM MCISAAC



Aaron with Frank Robinson (L) at their Hall of Fame induction in 1982.

ATLANTA BRAVES



GETTY IMAGES/ RICH PILLING; MLB PHOTOS

STATUES & MONUMENTS

TURNER FIELD
MONUMENT GROVE
Statue, Bust, No. 44 Monument, Braves Hall of Fame Plaque.

TURNER FIELD
PARKING LOT
Home Run No. 715 Monument, Wall Section From Atlanta Stadium.

TURNER FIELD
755 Club,100-Foot-High Image of Home Run No. 715 Ball Hovers Over Plaza, Silhouette of 715 Swing on Seat Standard at End of Rows.

MILLER PARK
MILWAUKEE
Statue (above), Walk of Fame Plaque, Parking Lot Marker Where Home Run No. 755 Landed.

CARSON PARK
EAU CLAIRE, WISCONSIN
Statue As an 18-Year-Old Pro Rookie

NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME
COOPERSTOWN, N.Y.
Plaque

WISCONSIN ATHLETIC WALK OF FAME
MILWAUKEE
Plaque

ALL IN THE NAME

HANK AARON AWARD
Major League Baseball, Annually To Best Overall Hitter in Both Leagues

HANK AARON STADIUM
Home of Mobile BayBears in Mobile, Ala.

HANK AARON STATE TRAIL
7 MILES, MILWAUKEE

HANK AARON DRIVE
ATLANTA

755 HANK AARON DR.
TURNER FIELD ADDRESS

HANK AARON MUSEUM & LEARNING CENTER
MOBILE, ALA.

AWARDS

STATE OF ALABAMA, ACADEMY OF HONOR
2007

HORATIO ALGER ASSOCIATION OF DISTINGUISHED AMERICANS
2005

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. CENTER SALUTE TO GREATNESS,
2003

PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM
2002

PRESIDENTIAL CITIZENS MEDAL
2001

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS LIVING LEGEND AWARD
2000

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL ALL-CENTURY TEAM
1999

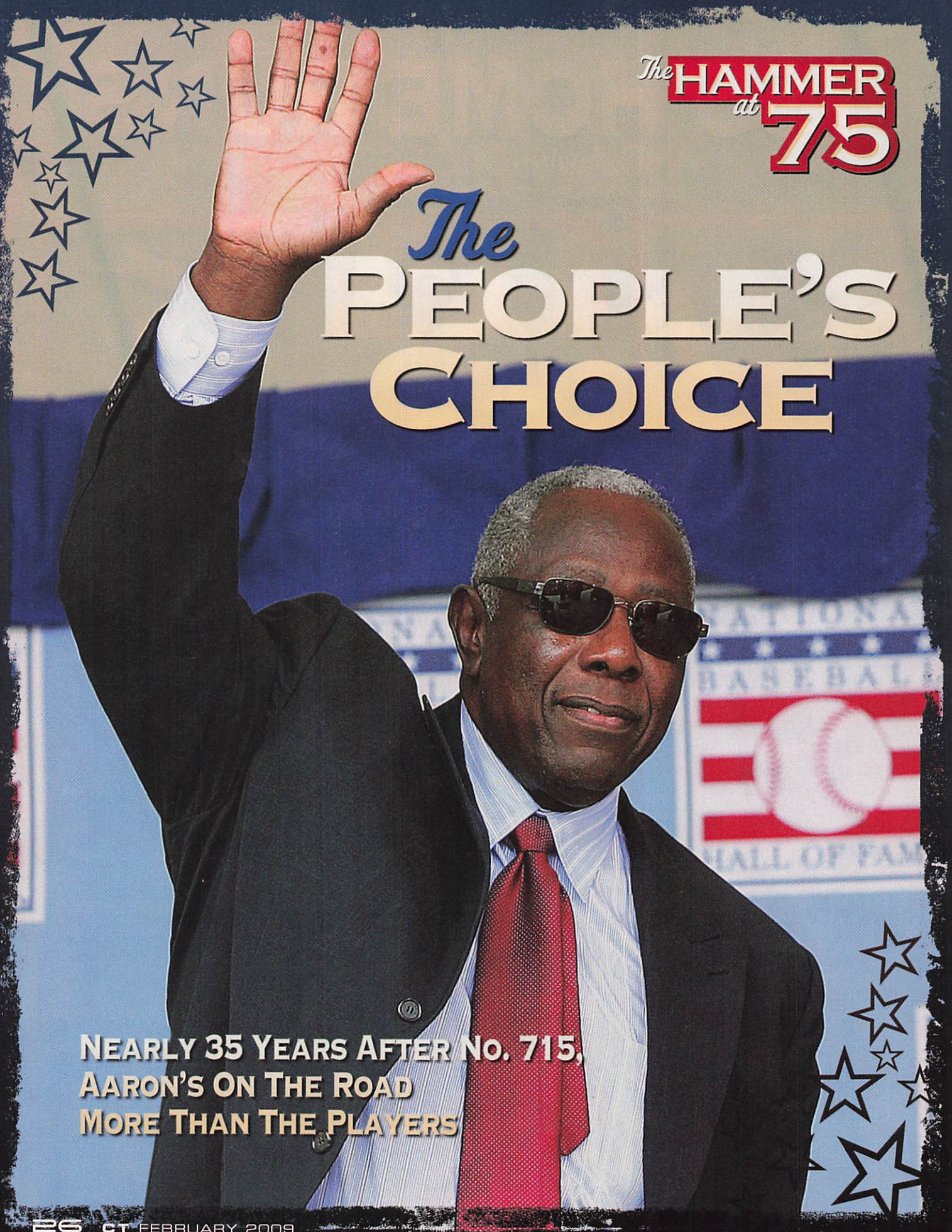
NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME
1982

RETIRED UNIFORM NO. 44
Atlanta Braves (1975), Milwaukee Brewers (1976)

LOU GEHRIG AWARD
1970

HONORARY DEGREES

1992	Columbia College Chicago
1995	Emory University
2000	Dartmouth College Tufts University
2003	Spelman College
2005	University of Notre Dame
2008	Concordia University Wisconsin
*1995	Gave commencement address at Harvard University.


The HAMMER at 75
The PEOPLE'S CHOICE
NEARLY 35 YEARS AFTER NO. 715, AARON'S ON THE ROAD MORE THAN THE PLAYERS

BY JON COOPER

FOR MOST BALLPLAYERS, retirement means fading into the sunset, allowing themselves to be forgotten or perhaps resurfacing as a coach or a broadcaster. Henry Aaron wasn't like most ballplayers when he played, so it's not surprising that he's not like most ballplayers in retirement.

Aaron's legend has never faded. He's certainly never been forgotten. In fact, he's as relevant and popular today - perhaps more so - as he's ever been. The mailmen who have sore backs from carrying bags of mail to his office on the Terrace Level at Turner Field can attest to that.

"When I came back from Christmas, I had three plastic crates full of mail," said Susan Bailey, Aaron's assistant since 1980. "I get requests for him every day. It's everything from appearances to signing autographs. Primarily, it's speeches, everything from people wanting him to participate in parades... it runs the gamut.

"We get a lot of Eagle Scout requests. He's an honorary Eagle Scout, so we will send out letters congratulating those that obtain Eagle Scout status."

Seemingly, everyone wants an audience with the former home run king (though almost all the letters Bailey has received since Barry Bonds chased and eclipsed Aaron's career 755 home run total in 2007 still reference Aaron as the "king").

Colleges seek Aaron for commencement addresses. On the wall of his office hang honorary degrees received from Harvard, Emory University (Atlanta) and Spring Hill College (Mobile, Ala.), and he's also been honored by Notre Dame and several other schools.

Other organizations looking for Aaron recently include the Orange Bowl Committee, as well as representatives of Florida Governor Charlie Crist, on behalf of the Governor's Baseball Dinner, which welcomes the 18 teams that hold spring training in the Sunshine State.

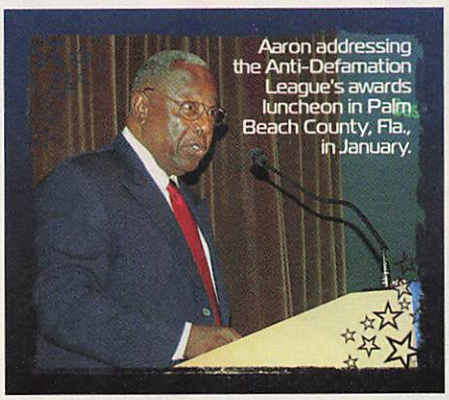
Aaron's appeal doesn't end in the South or even in the United States. He is one of Major League Baseball's most beloved ambassadors, having traveled the world to promote the game. He visited Cuba twice in the '90s to help promote the game, and in 1989, he co-founded the World Children's Baseball Fair (WCBF) with Japan's Home Run King, Sadaharu Oh. The fair is a week-long clinic that has been held in the U.S. and Canada, Puerto Rico and most often in Japan.

"I would say [his appeal is] international," said Bailey, who owns a ball autographed by former Cuban president Fidel Castro, a souvenir from one of Aaron's trips. "He's huge in Japan, they love him, Korea even. I get fan mail from Europe. I get fan mail from Canada. I get fan mail for him from all over the world. It's really amazing."

Just as amazing are the number of autograph requests that flood Aaron's office.

"It's mostly cards, pictures, magazines," said Bailey. "But people send baseballs. People send bats, jerseys. Recently, I've gotten a lot of little platforms for a statue of him. Any baseball memorabilia that has his name on it has been sent to this office at some point.

"People send some valuable items to us, and they send it through the regular mail. I just go, 'Wow.' They're valuable, like some really old baseball cards. We're not talking about [cards worth] thousands of dollars, but some of them are very old. They're worth some money, and people just send them through the general mail."



Aaron addressing the Anti-Defamation League's awards luncheon in Palm Beach County, Fla., in January.

ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE

Fans should know that most of the material ends up being returned unsigned because Aaron has an exclusive contract with Steiner Sports, a New York-based sports memorabilia company, for which he does two or three autograph appearances annually, all in New York. (Autograph seekers can ask permission through Steiner or call Aaron's office to check on the possibility of getting his signature. Fans also should send valuable items in a manner that's trackable.)

Aaron's office also gets plenty of interview requests, most of them to talk baseball — though discussions about steroids are off-limits. But he is hardly a one-trick pony.

Stories of his on-the-field exploits are remarkable, but he also is asked to talk about persevering in the face of discrimination during the '50s, '60s and '70s, especially about his ordeal while pursuing Babe Ruth's home run record, which included death threats. Aaron's courage during those difficult times has made him a key speaker on the subject of combating racism, and he has become an important advocate for racial tolerance and social change.

For example, in early January, Aaron was a guest speaker for the Anti-Defamation League's Eighth Annual Palm Beach Educator Awards Luncheon, where 44 education centers in Palm Beach County, Fla., were honored for introducing diversity programs into their curriculum.

Aaron's standing among African-American leaders led to his being called into the spotlight last November, when numerous interview requests came in after the election of Illinois Senator Barack Obama as the United States' first African-American president. (There's also the interesting parallel that Aaron wore uniform No. 44, and Obama is the 44th president.)

Obama's election was an emotional topic for Aaron, but he was not in attendance on Jan. 20 for the historic inauguration. He and his wife, Billye, were invited, of course, but she said they did not go due to concerns about being able to get around comfortably in such a large crowd.

It's probably just as well that he wasn't in Washington, as there were plenty of causes and organizations that needed Aaron's attention, including the Chasing the Dream Foundation, which he and wife, Billye, started in 1994, that awards grants to youngsters that excel in their fields of interest, athletic, artistic or other.

"He's still heavily involved, he and his wife," said Bailey. "In addition to the Foundation work that is done here in Atlanta, we have partnered with Major League Baseball and Boys and Girls Clubs. There is a separate program that is administered through Boys and Girls Clubs."

Aaron also is on Commissioner Bud Selig's Advisory Committee, which will meet later in the year to discuss the state of baseball.

His seemingly endless list of requests and responsibilities begs the question, would it be possible for Aaron, who celebrates his 75th birthday on Feb. 5, to conceivably be scheduled for something every day?

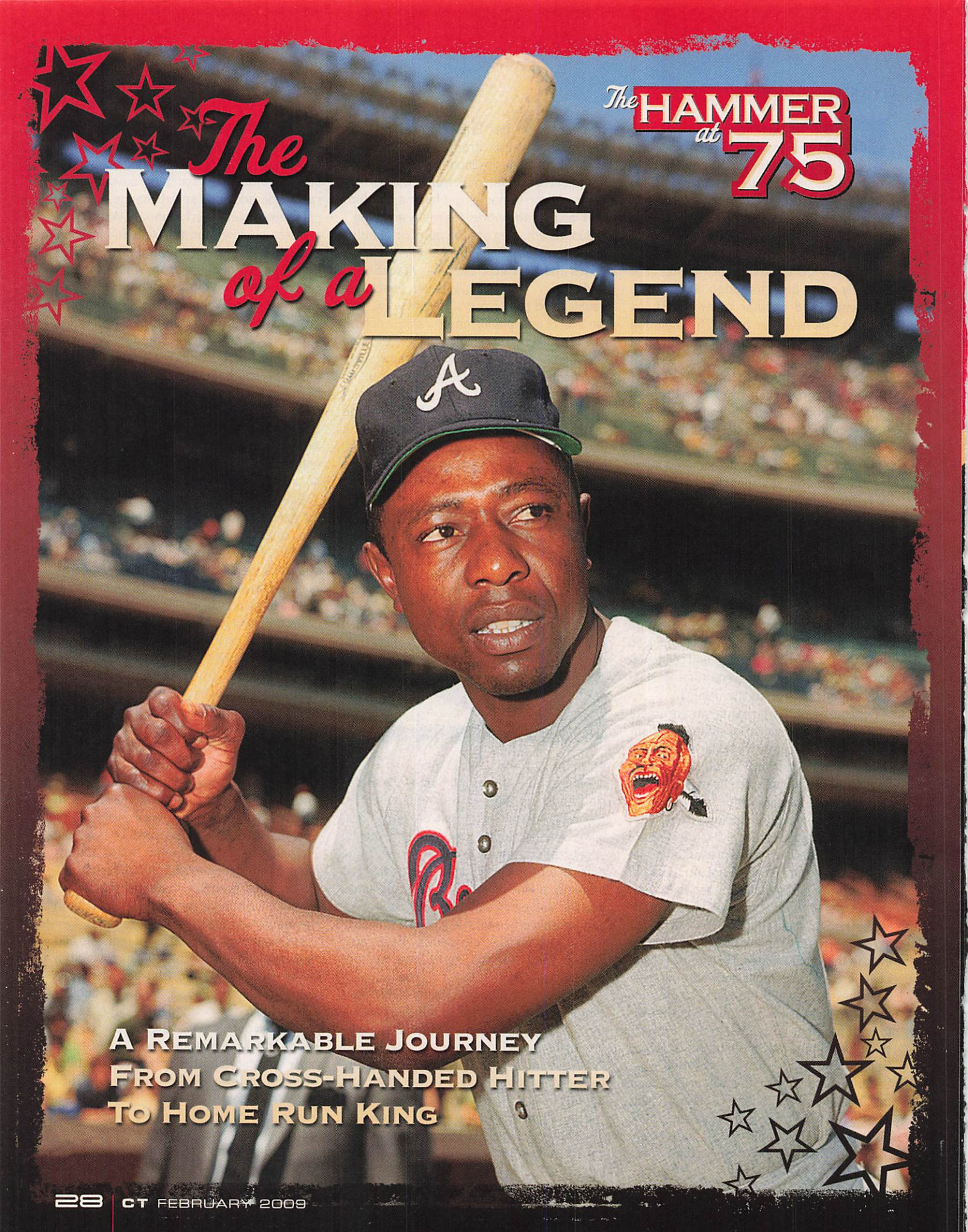
"I pulled out his 2008 schedule, and he was out of Atlanta 94 days last year," said Bailey.

By comparison, the Braves were scheduled out of town 87 days during the 2008 regular season.

"He could be gone every week," said Bailey, "not every day."

Of course not. After all, he is retired.

GETTY IMAGES/JIM MCISAAC



The Making of a Legend

The Hammer at 75

A Remarkable Journey From Cross-Handed Hitter To Home Run King

BY BOB BUEGE

AT AGE 75, Hank Aaron may well be the world's greatest living ballplayer. He is almost certainly the most respected figure in baseball.

His accomplishments speak for themselves: Pennant-winning home run in 1957... Highest batting average (.393) in the Braves' 1957 World Series victory... 25 All-Star Game selections... Lifetime .305 batting average... More home runs (755) than anyone else ever hit prior to 2007... More major league records than any other player... Induction to the Hall of Fame at Cooperstown... The list goes on... and on...

In more than half a century as a public figure, "The Hammer" or "Hammerin' Hank" or "Bad Henry" has brought nothing but honor to himself and to his sport.

The only thing more remarkable than Aaron's level of athletic achievement is the path he traveled to get there. His odyssey began on Edward Avenue in the black section "down the bay" in Mobile, Alabama. The third of eight children of a shipyard worker and his wife, young Henry was born at the depth of the Great Depression, and had no reason to anticipate a life of fame and fortune. As a boy, he picked cotton and developed his baseball hitting skills by swatting bottle caps with a broomstick.

Aaron's segregated high school did not offer baseball, so he played softball, batting cross-handed because it felt natural and he had no coach to tell him to do otherwise.

He played semipro ball on Sundays with the Mobile Black Bears. His screaming line drives caught the attention of Syd Pollock, owner of the Indianapolis Clowns of the Negro American League. In the spring of 1952, without finishing his senior year, Aaron left Mobile with two dollars in his pocket and two sandwiches in his satchel, boarding a train to Winston-Salem, N.C., to join the Clowns.

Aaron's career in the Negro League was brief. In June, he signed a contract with the Boston Braves organization. The New York Giants were also bidding for Aaron's services, but they offered him $100 a month less than the Braves did. For barely three bucks more a day, the Giants could have had Hank Aaron and Willie Mays side by side in the outfield.

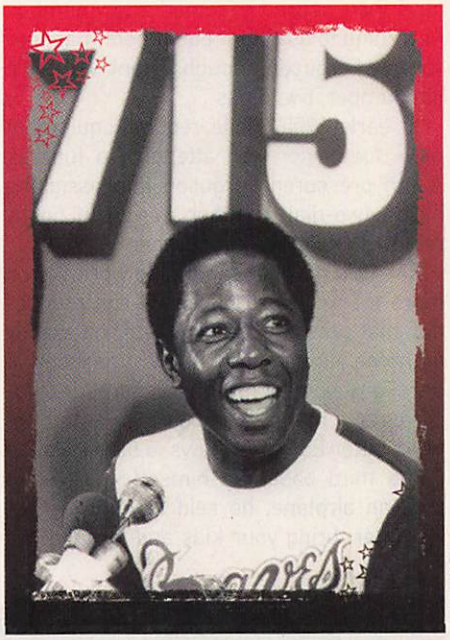
In the end, the Braves purchased Aaron from the Clowns for $10,000. As Braves general manager John Quinn later told the Saturday Evening Post, "We were not rich back there in 1952. Ten thousand dollars was a good deal of money to us that year."

To Mark Teixeira and CC Sabathia, of course, that would be tip money today.

Eighteen-year-old Aaron was assigned to the Eau Claire Bears of the Northern League. The distance from Mobile to the north woods of Wisconsin was a thousand miles geographically but a million miles socially.

Clell Buzzell, sports editor of the Eau Claire newspaper, greeted Aaron at the airport. They stopped at Buzzell's home, and Aaron met the editor's wife. It was the first white person's home Aaron ever entered. According to Mrs. Buzzell's account, the young ballplayer was shaking.

Eau Claire not only introduced Aaron to



ATLANTA BRAVES

"organized baseball" but also opened his eyes to a world he had never before experienced. For starters, he could eat at any restaurant in town. He was not the first black ballplayer Eau Claire had seen. Future Milwaukee centerfielder Billy Bruton desegregated the Bears in 1950, the same year Sam Jethroe broke the color line of the Boston Braves.

Besides Aaron, the Bears had two other African American players, Wes Covington, who would become another key member of the '57 World Champs, and Julius "Julie" Bowers. The three roomed downtown in the YMCA, at a cost of a dollar a day, and walked a little more than a mile to the ballpark. Aaron batted against white pitchers for the first time and quickly discovered that he could do so successfully.

Using whatever bat he pulled indiscriminately off the rack, he batted .336, narrowly missed the batting title, and earned Northern League Rookie of the Year honors. He ripped a ton of line drives but belted only nine home runs.

After the Northern League season ended, Aaron rejoined the Clowns and, batting .400, helping them win the Negro League World Series. In March, he reported to the Milwaukee Brewers of the American Association at their spring training in Kissimmee, Florida. His teammates were shocked and amazed by what they saw.

"Somebody told me about it," recalled his former Milwaukee teammate, Felix Mantilla, "and I thought they were joking. But I saw it. Hank was hitting cross-handed. He used to hit both ways, cross-handed and regular. He hit the ball a long ways cross-handed."

Before spring training ended in 1953, the Milwaukee Brewers became the Toledo Sox, because the Boston Braves moved to Milwaukee, and Aaron and Mantilla were roommates and doubleplay partners (Aaron playing second base) for the Jacksonville (Fla.) Braves.

Mantilla said, "When we joined Jacksonville, Hank was hitting them all over the place. He was hitting them the regular way. He wasn't that great of an infielder, though. He had a lot of problems trying to make doubleplays. If he needed to make a soft throw from a short distance, his throws were too hard. They used to be flying by me all the time."

At Jacksonville, Aaron batted .362, nearly won the Triple Crown, earned the league's Most Valuable Player Award, and led his club to first place.

The season, however, was no picnic for Aaron, nor for his two black teammates, Mantilla and outfielder Horace Garner. They were the first African American ballplayers in the South Atlantic League. Verbal abuse from fans was constant, and Mantilla even received a death threat in Jacksonville.

"The FBI told me, 'Don't worry about it. We're gonna be all over the park,'" Mantilla said. "But of all the cities in the league - Montgomery, Alabama; Columbus, Georgia; Savannah, Macon - Jacksonville was about the best one."

Mantilla was the best shortstop in the

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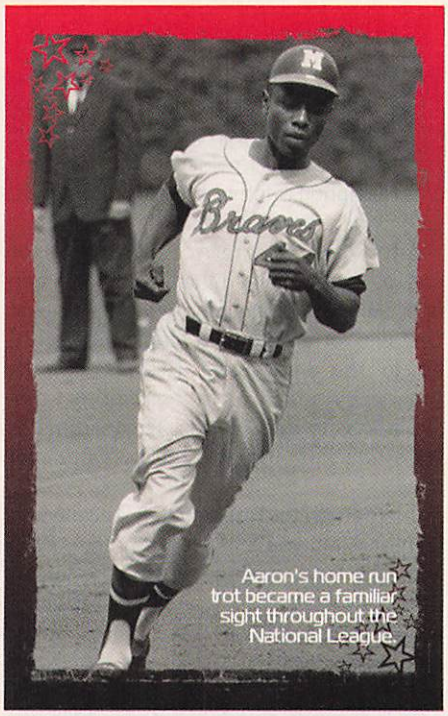


Aaron's home run trot became a familiar sight throughout the National League.

NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME

league, but he was not chosen for the All-Star game, played in Savannah, Ga. Aaron was selected - but prohibited.

"The governor said he was going to be there in the front row," Mantilla explained, "to stop Hank from playing."

A potentially ugly scene was averted because Aaron suffered an injury a few days before the game and was unable to play.

Following the season at Jacksonville, Aaron and Mantilla played winter ball with the Caguas team in the Puerto Rican League. The late Bob Buhl, a Milwaukee Braves rookie righthander, pitched for Caguas the same year. In a 1993 interview, Buhl recalled, "We got a phone call (in Caguas) from Mr. (John) Quinn, the Braves general manager, about how things were going. I got to talking to him. He says, 'How is Henry Aaron doing?'

"I said, 'If you don't get him off second base, he's going to kill himself.' He says, 'What do you mean?'

"I said, 'Well, he's not a second baseman.' So Quinn said, 'What do you suggest we do?' I said, 'Put him in the outfield.' So Mickey Owen, the manager down there, put him in the outfield. He must have gotten orders from higher up. I don't think Henry has ever forgotten that."

Aaron was projected for one more year in the minors, but fate intervened during the Milwaukee Braves' spring training in March 1954. Veteran Bobby Thomson broke his ankle, and Aaron was thrust into the big leagues. He never looked back. He might have won Rookie of the Year, except he broke his ankle on Sept. 5 when he was hitting .280 with 13 homers and 69 RBIs.

The next season, 1955, he batted over .300 (.314) for the first of 14 times. And in 1956, he won the first of his two batting crowns (.328). The following year, he was voted MVP and had three home runs and seven RBIs to help the Braves beat the favored Yankees in the World Series.

Unlike baseball's present-day heroes, Aaron received few of the trappings of stardom. For years, his locker was located next to the bat boy's. Even his original uniform number was not of his choosing.

Aaron was issued numeral "5" in his rookie year because he played second base in the minors, and the Braves customarily gave their second basemen a low number. According to assistant equipment manager Tommy Ferguson, though, "Hank wanted a big number, two digits."

In early 1955, while regular equipment man Joe Taylor was attending a funeral, Aaron pressured Ferguson into assigning him a two-digit number. Ferguson finally relented and gave him number 44.

The new number seemed to work. Aaron more than doubled his home run production that season (to 27) and later hit exactly 44 home runs in four different seasons. If only Ferguson had given him number 65!

Respect manifests itself in a variety of ways. After Eddie Mathews, a future Hall of Fame third baseman himself, learned to pilot an airplane, he said to Aaron, "Hey, Hammer, bring your kids and I'll take you out flying."

They flew over Aaron's house and waved to his family and had a terrific time. When general manager John McHale got wind of the flying episode, he told Mathews, "Eddie, we don't mind you flying, but don't take Hank with you."

In 1960, Aaron became a TV star. He was one of 19 sluggers selected for a syndicated show called "Home Run Derby." Each week, two batters would compete in a head-to-head home run contest filmed at Wrigley Field in Los Angeles. The winner received $2,000, the loser $1,000, with a $500 bonus for hitting three homers in a row.

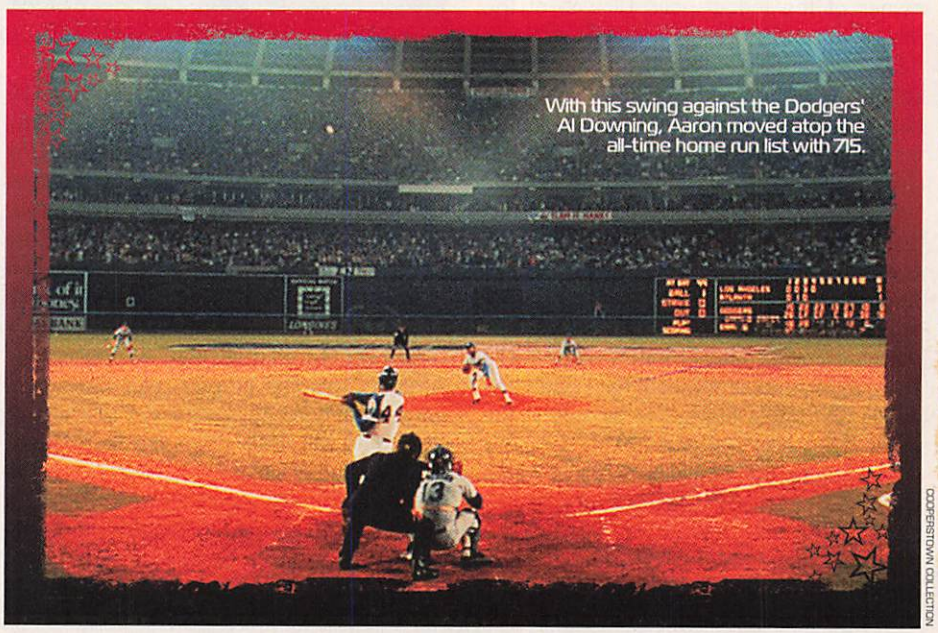
For six straight weeks, Aaron outslugged his opponents before finally losing to Wally Post. Aaron's winnings from the show, $13,500, nearly matched his $17,000 annual salary. At that moment, a light bulb went on.

"I noticed that they never had a show called 'Singles Derby,'" Aaron was quoted as saying.

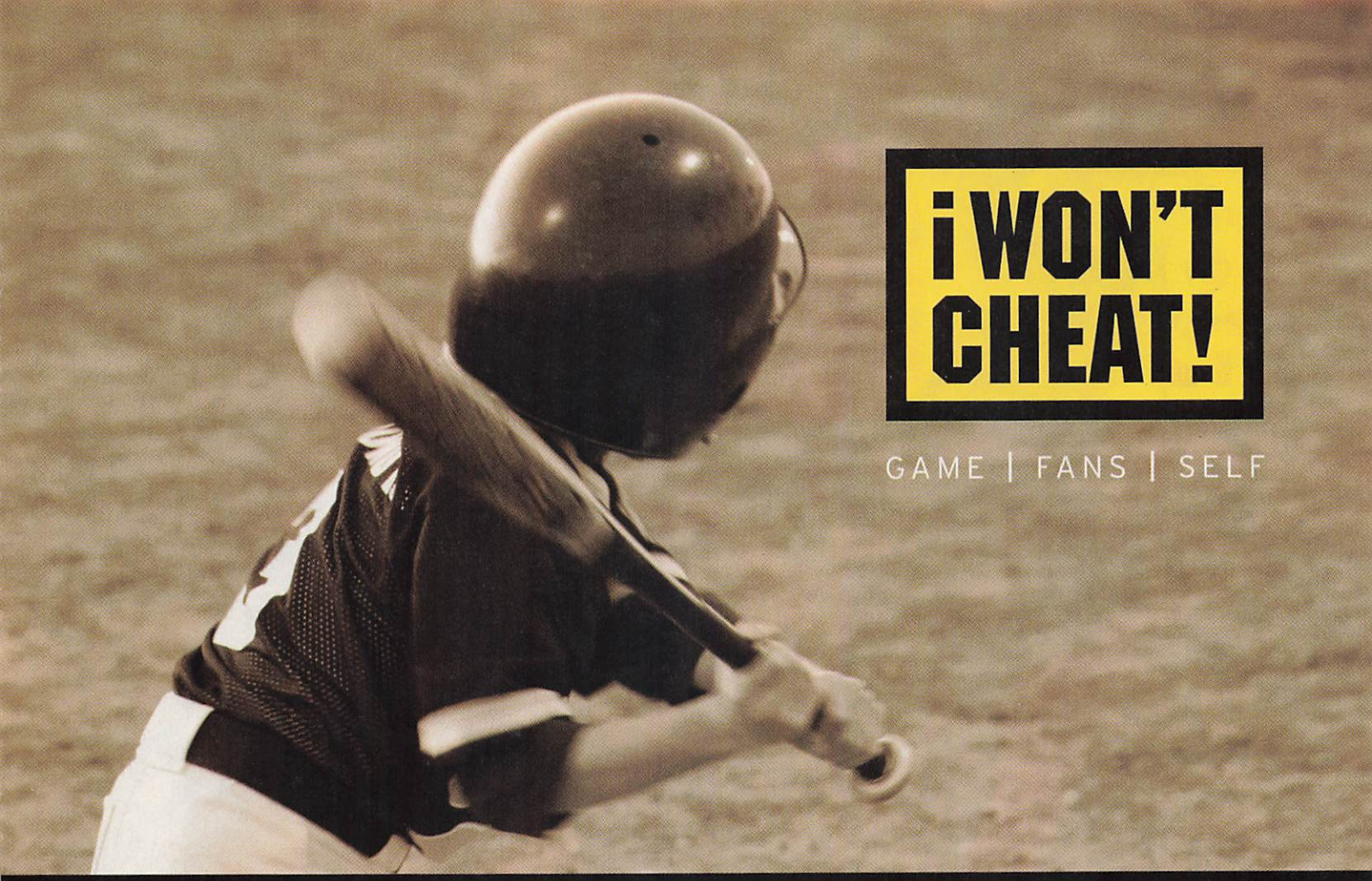
He promptly changed his swing, became a pull hitter, and pledged his allegiance to the home run.

The degree to which he succeeded - 755 times in all - is breath-taking but should not be surprising. As his old home run mate and fellow Hall of Famer Eddie Mathews said, "Hank could hit in a dark closet."

- Bob Buege, a member of the Milwaukee Braves Historical Association, is author of "The Milwaukee Braves: A Baseball Eulogy" and "Eddie Mathews and The National Pastime."

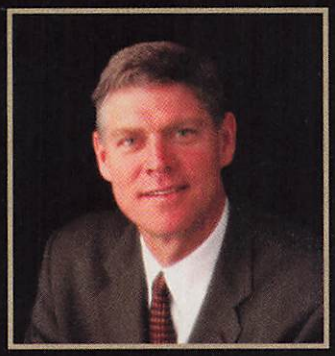

With this swing against the Dodgers' Al Downing, Aaron moved atop the all-time home run list with 715.

COOPERSTOWN COLLECTION



I WON'T CHEAT!

GAME | FANS | SELF



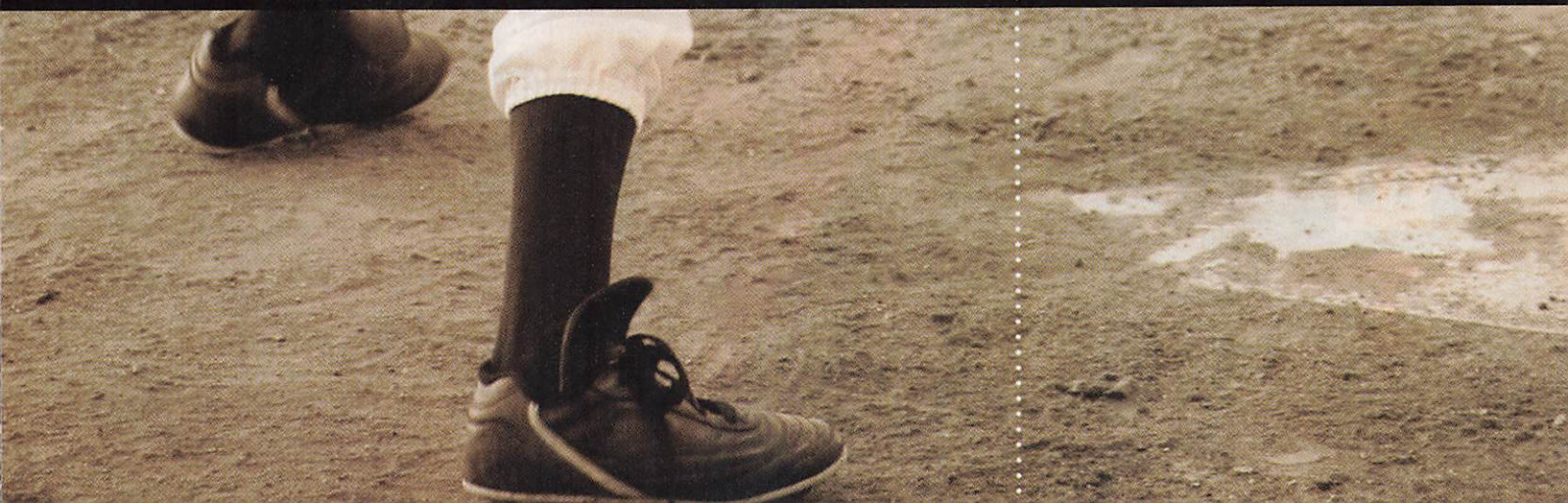
"Youth athletes who feel the pressure to cheat have been damaged the most by the steroid problem. Let's work together to create a drug free atmosphere in sports."

–Dale Murphy

2 TIME NL MVP, ATLANTA BRAVES

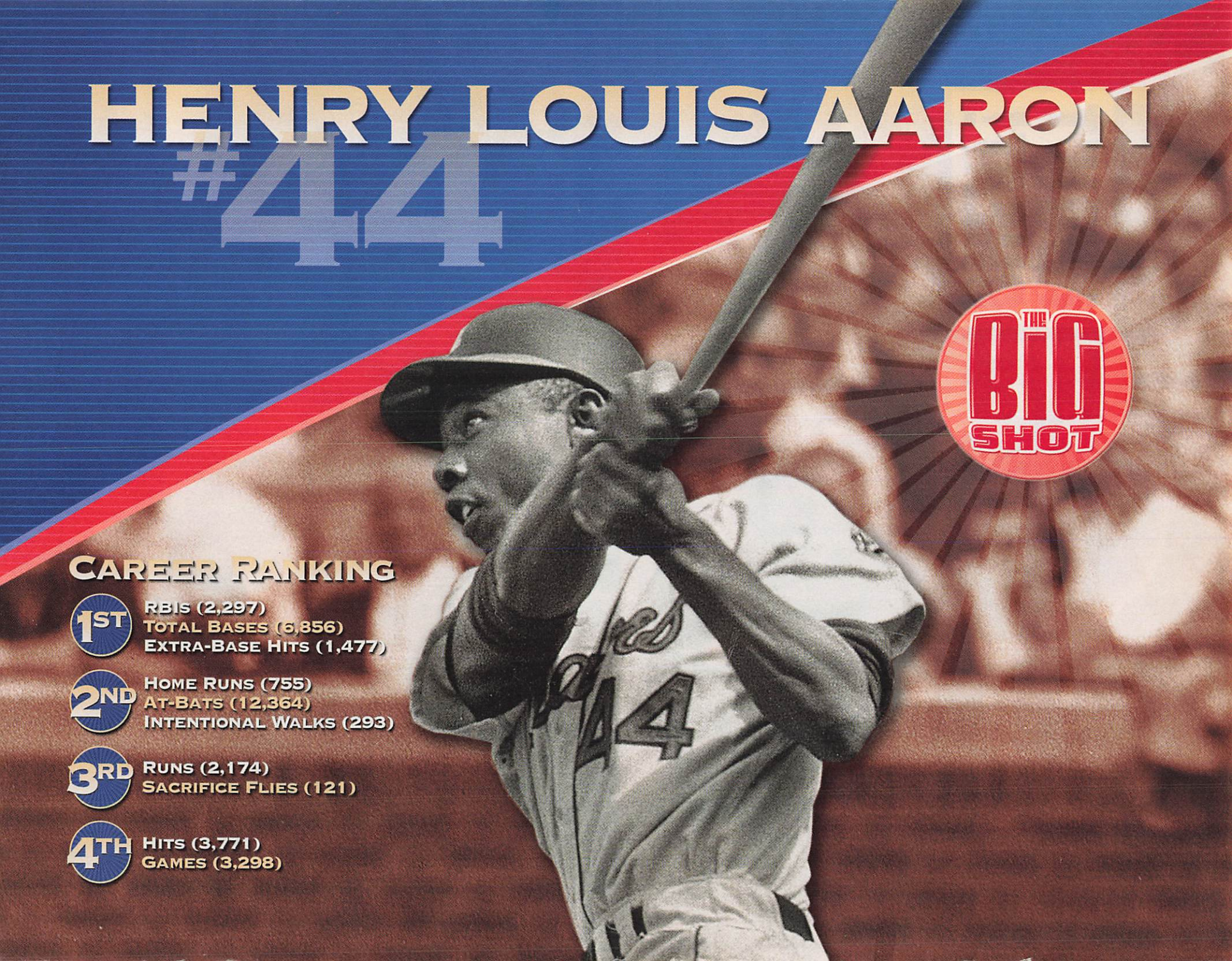
FOUNDER OF THE I WON'T CHEAT FOUNDATION

www.iwontcheat.com



HENRY LOUIS AARON

#44



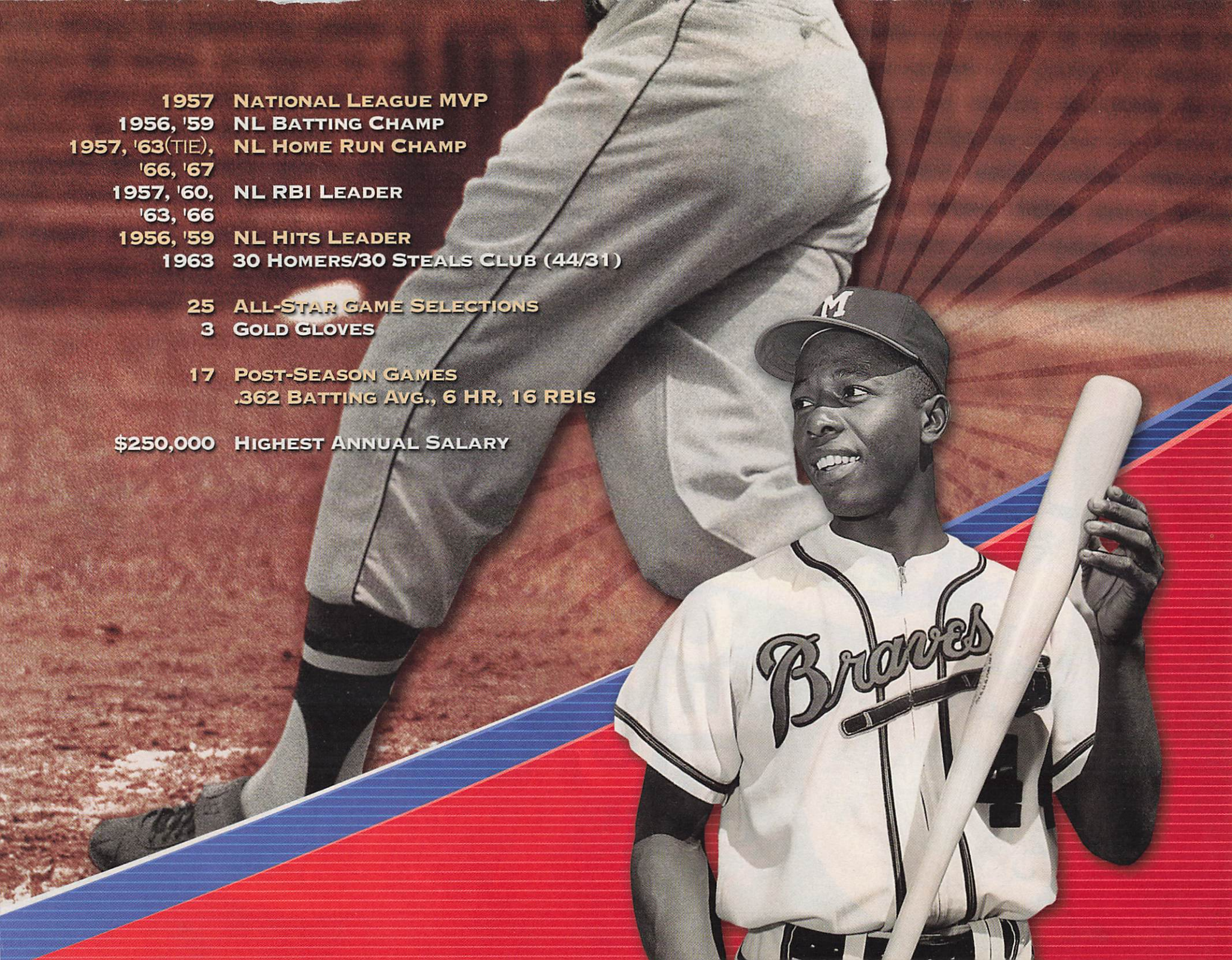
CAREER RANKING

1ST
- RBIS (2,297)
- TOTAL BASES (6,856)
- EXTRA-BASE HITS (1,477)

2ND
- HOME RUNS (755)
- AT-BATS (12,364)
- INTENTIONAL WALKS (293)

3RD
- RUNS (2,174)
- SACRIFICE FLIES (121)

4TH
- HITS (3,771)
- GAMES (3,298)


1957 National League MVP
1956, '59 NL Batting Champ
1957, '63(TIE), '66, '67 NL Home Run Champ
1957, '60, '63, '66 NL RBI Leader
1956, '59 NL Hits Leader
1963 30 Homers/30 Steals Club (44/31)
25 All-Star Game Selections
3 Gold Gloves
17 Post-Season Games
.362 Batting Avg., 6 HR, 16 RBIs
$250,000 Highest Annual Salary
Braves

The HAMMER at 75

A PIECE of GREATNESS

WIDE VARIETY OF AARON MEMORABILIA INCREASING IN POPULARITY - AND COST

BY STEVE FALL

DIEHARD BRAVES FAN Terry Davis (Jan. '08 CT) received the ultimate Christmas gift three years ago from his wife, Marcia: Not one, but two autographed Hank Aaron jerseys.

"When I opened the first one, I said, 'This is incredible!'" recalled Davis.

But why two signed jerseys? Marcia explained that she knew how often her husband donates memorabilia for charitable causes. While true, Davis draws the line when it comes to his favorite player.

"Anything I get from Hank Aaron, I keep," he said.

Whether for fun or profit, times are good for collectors of Aaron memorabilia and baseball cards. David Hunt, president of Hunt Auctions in Exton, Pa., explained that as former baseball greats age, fans' desire to either meet them or obtain their autograph increases.

"There are not a lot of players still with us that are on Hank's level," said Hunt. "Some people would argue that there are none. It's a very short list."

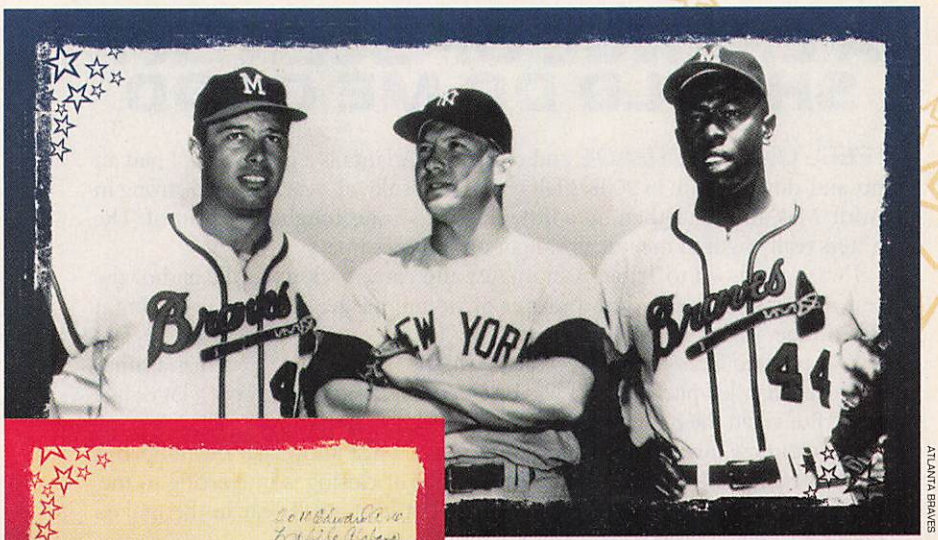
While Aaron memorabilia may not get as much attention as items from Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig or Mickey Mantle, it does attract significant interest. Baseballs autographed by Aaron cost $150-$200, according to Bob Pressley (Jan. '09 CT) of B.P. Sports Collectibles in Marietta, Ga. Signed Aaron bats range from $300 to $500, depending on the quality of the bat and other factors, such as whether he wrote "755" under his autograph. Photos, which vary in price based on size and the quality of the photo, cost $100-$300.

Game-used Aaron bats and jerseys can have tremendous value, simply because they're more difficult to obtain.

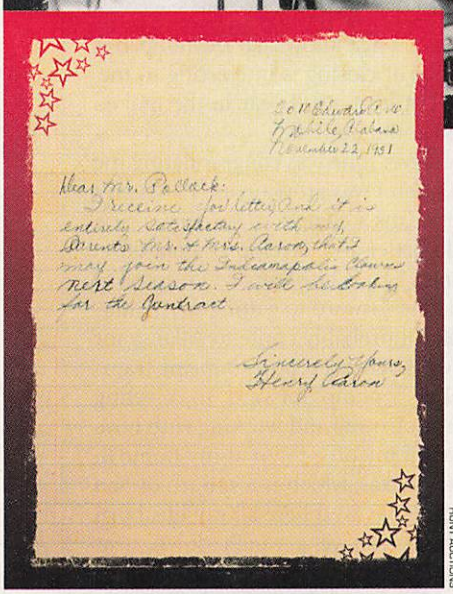
"He played a long career. So he used a number of bats, and many of them were cracked and got given out," said Hunt. "They are not extraordinarily rare, but they are desirable. So they're going to range anywhere from one that was used late in his career that might be a $3,000-$4,000 bat to one that was used early in his career in the 1950s – which would be obviously fairly rare – and that could be $10,000, $15,000 or more."

The same concept applies to uniforms. One of Aaron's Milwaukee Braves jerseys from the late 1950s – a home uniform in great condition – could go for $50,000 to $100,000, according to Hunt.

Oddly enough, Aaron getting passed by Barry Bonds as the all-time home run king made Aaron collectibles even more coveted.



ATLANTA BRAVES


Dear Mr. Pollack:
Sincerely yours,
Henry Aaron
HUNT AUCTIONS

Aaron played in a golden era of baseball with and against such greats as teammate Eddie Mathews (L) and Mickey Mantle (center). This letter he wrote as a teenager sold for $24,150 last year to a collector in Charlotte, N.C.

"Everything that went on with Barry Bonds breaking the record – much like what happened with [Mark] McGwire and [Roger] Maris – there was a renewed interest in Hank," said Pressley. "I don't think if he got into it with controversy, it would have helped his interest at all, as far as collectability."

"As time goes on, he very much has been more appreciated, especially with the steroid scandal," said Hunt. "Because obviously Hank had nothing to do with that, nor did he use them. So, the numbers that he accomplished have put his career in perspective. I think people do appreciate that, and that has translated into collector value."

It's not just the traditional Hank Aaron collectibles that draw interest. Pressley estimates a ticket stub from the April 8, 1974, game in which Aaron hit his 715th home run would cost $100-$200. If somebody happens to own a whole ticket (unlikely since they were torn, not scanned at entry gates back then), that could go for $500-$800.

Hunt Auctions found out just how far some enthusiasts will go to purchase rare Aaron items. They auctioned a handwritten letter for $24,150 last March (April '08 CT). Aaron wrote the letter as a 17-year-old to Syd Pollack, the owner of the Indianapolis Clowns in the Negro Leagues. Aaron started his career with the Clowns in 1952 before he was sold to the Braves organization.

"To have something like that which originates right from the very inception of his career is extraordinarily rare," said Hunt.

Baseball fans can find unusual Aaron collectibles any number of places, but they might not be for sale. Hobbyists like Dave Klug (Nov. '07 CT) collect for fun and never sell anything. Klug packs three and a half rooms of his Lincoln, Ill., home with an estimated 100,000 pieces of Milwaukee Braves memorabilia.

"I have the original home plate from the first five years of the team's existence, and he [Aaron] autographed that," said Klug.

Klug has 10-20 signatures of Aaron on various items, and countless more unsigned pieces. He has programs from events where Aaron spoke, advertising pieces, t-shirts with his picture on them, buttons and small statues of him.

Davis also never sells memorabilia. His Harrisburg, Pa., home features an entire basement wall dedicated to Aaron, Eddie Mathews and Warren Spahn. He owns unusual Aaron items like a Wheaties box and

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A CHANGE OF SCENERY SHOULD DO ME GOOD

I FEEL LIKE THE TRADE and coming to Atlanta is a gift for me. I had an up-and-down season in 2008. I felt great, physically, all year. I started strong in April, May and June, then hit a little slump that was tough to get out of. The hitters really figured me out, and I got out of my game.

I was sent down to Triple-A in August and came back up at the end of the season, but it was really just a matter of riding out the season and putting it behind me.

I wasn't used in any sort of regular role in the bullpen. I see myself as a situational left-handed pitcher, and I was being used in all kinds of ways, a lot of late relief. But when the phone rang, I never really knew if they were calling for me.

I don't know how the Braves plan to use me. I just know that the bullpen is the coolest place to be. I will say that the idea of closing is interesting to me. Eventually it would be awesome, but I need at least a full year in the majors under my belt and more experience before I could do that.

When I learned I was traded to the Braves, everyone was congratulating me because they knew I was a huge Braves fan when I was growing up. I know it's a great organization, but for me, the trade means a change of scenery, a new place and team, and I want to see if I can do better and develop as a player.

I think I'll definitely benefit from the change. The White Sox and I seemed to be going in different directions, and I'm looking forward to getting to Atlanta.

> "THE WHITE SOX AND I SEEMED TO BE GOING IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS, AND I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO GETTING TO ATLANTA."

I think I'll probably come to Atlanta for a few days before I report to spring training. I'm looking forward to meeting Roger McDowell and working with him.

I spend my off-season at my home in Helotes, Texas, which is a suburb of San Antonio. I've lived here all my life, born and raised. I have a ranch down near Laredo where I go on the weekends. I'm no Chipper Jones - my place is only 500 acres! It's called the Rio Seco Ranch, which means Dry River in Spanish. There's a seasonal river that goes right through the middle of the ranch.

I played tee-ball and Little League, summer league baseball and high school ball. In my senior year, I finally made the varsity and did well enough to be drafted. The scouts were all over the place.

The Braves were interested, and so were the White Sox. I was 17 years old and was drafted in the 20th round, but even though I wasn't really a college guy, I decided I wasn't ready to leave home.

So, I went to junior college for a year to get some age and another year of playing baseball under my belt. I went to Temple College in Temple, Texas, because (former Braves pitcher) Craig McMurtry was the coach there. A year later, I signed with the White Sox.

I made my major league debut in 2006, my fourth year in baseball. I was having a really good spring, but I was still in single A. I was working out on the back fields, and a change in my arm angle really helped me do better.

The coaches were watching me and said, "We're going to bring in some hitters for you," so they brought in Jim Thome and Rob Mackowiak and some other lefties. I ended up striking them all out. Then I got into a spring game and struck a bunch of guys out. They came to me and said, "Move your stuff to this side of the clubhouse. You're fighting for a major league job."

I broke camp with the club and went to Chicago. I was 21 years old. I got up to Chicago, and it all caught up with me. I was there for two months. I was struggling, and I was the only rookie, so I was getting hazed, bad. I was sent down to Triple A in Charlotte and was, like, "Thank you!"

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

a framed article from the Saturday Evening Post dated Summer 1972. Davis also cherishes a baseball he grabbed during batting practice before his favorite player's last game as a Brave in 1974. Aaron homered that day in his final at-bat ever for the team.

Many collectors focus on baseball cards more than memorabilia. They treasure Aaron's 1954 Topps rookie card, which goes for $1,800, according to the Official Beckett Price Guide to Baseball Cards. First-year cards for superstar players always have the most value, but condition impacts price.

"I have seen examples that we would call nicer than near mint – close to perfect – that may have sold for $5,000," said Pressley. "Yet that same card, with a minor crease in it, with a lot of wear on the edges, may sell for as low as a couple hundred dollars."

Topps also produced perhaps the strangest Aaron baseball card ever. His 1957 card shows him batting left-handed since Topps inadvertently used a reverse negative for the photo. The card was not corrected and released in large quantities, so it has no special value.

Klug points out that Aaron is not as accessible today as he used to be. Davis agrees, noting that he only attends one or two card shows per year now.

"He signed an exclusive with Steiner Sports out of New York, which has become fairly popular to go after a major athlete and sign him to an exclusive," said Pressley. "They are the only ones that get autographs done by him. They somewhat control the market on anything new being done by him, because he's under contract. I don't know if that still is in effect, but that controlled a lot of his autographs over the last two, three, four years."

Aaron used to sign mailed requests from people who made donations to his charitable Chasing the Dream Foundation, but he no longer does so, according to his assistant, Susan Bailey, due to his contract with Steiner.

Fans looking to start or add to their collections, can still find Aaron merchandise at shows, retail stores, and websites like eBay, at a wide range of prices. Pressley recommends those who shop on the internet purchase only from reputable companies.

"If you're a collector, Hank Aaron's stuff is definitely at the top of the list of items to get," said Davis, who believes that Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb memorabilia is the most valuable. "But Aaron will be like that, because he doesn't sign a lot of stuff. So anything that you have of his that's signed, it just makes it even more and more valuable to have."

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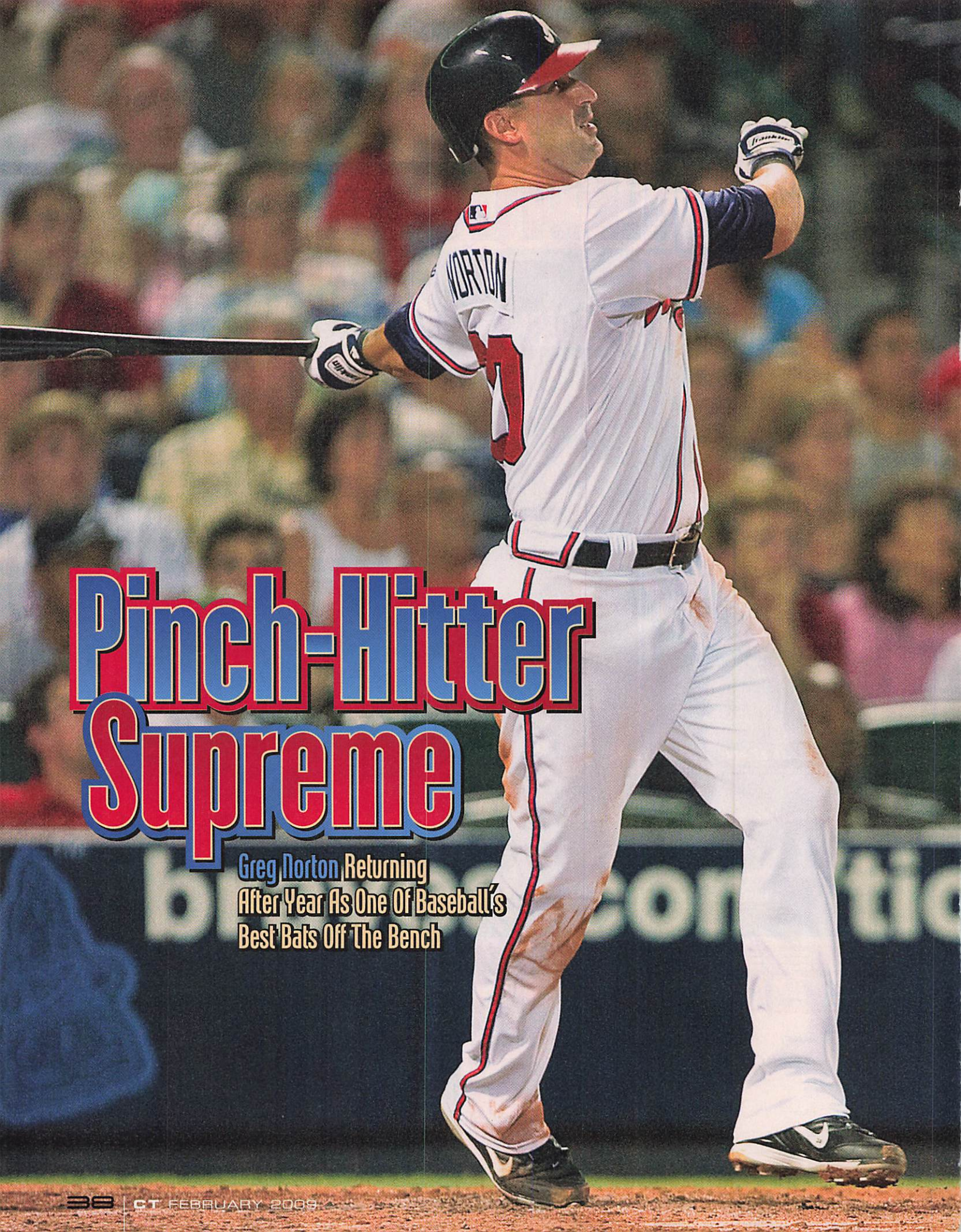


Pinch-Hitter Supreme

Greg Norton Returning After Year As One Of Baseball's Best Bats Off The Bench

BY JON COOPER

GREG NORTON will not be the biggest player in the Atlanta Braves clubhouse come 2009 spring training. Nor will he be the strongest or the fastest. But he may be the happiest.

While it may seem a tad unusual that a 36-year-old switch-hitter beginning his 13th major league season with his sixth different club is "just happy to be here," Norton, who signed a one-year, $800,000 free-agent contract on Dec. 19, is just that, especially since the "here" means with the Braves.

"My family and I really enjoyed our time [in Atlanta] after coming over from Seattle, so it's a very exciting time," said Norton, who was acquired by the Braves last May 5 for minor league lefthander Nelson Payano.

"Atlanta was my No. 1 choice. It was just a matter of getting together. We talked occasionally throughout the off-season and up until a couple of days before the time that they came with an offer. I expressed to Frank [Wren] and Bobby [Cox] and a lot of the other players that I'd like to come back."

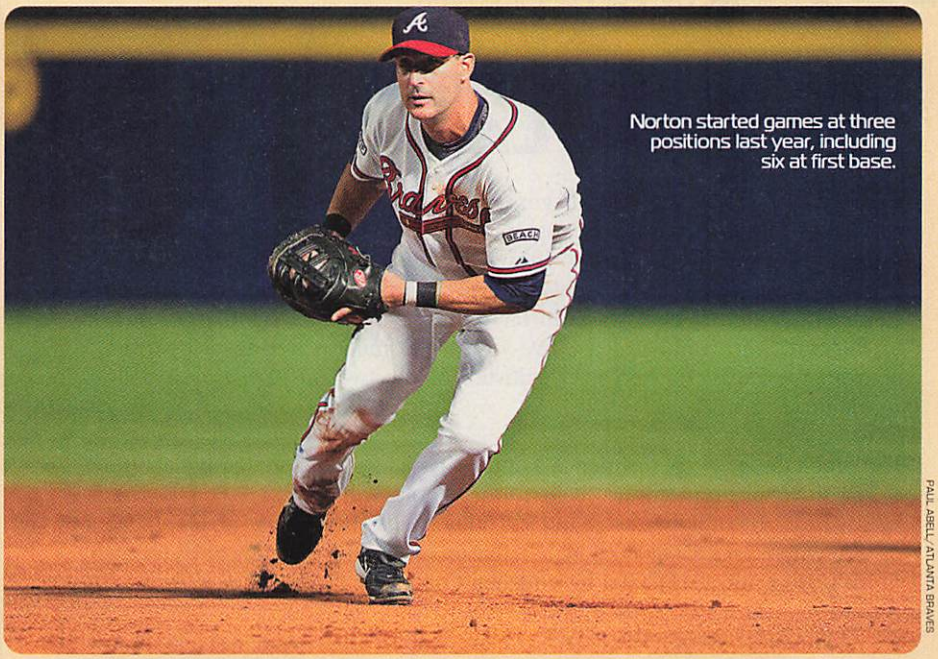
That desire had to be music to the ears of Wren, who has heard many an empty promise during this off-season, and Cox, who will again have a valuable weapon in his arsenal.

Last season, Norton was one of the Braves' most versatile and dependable players off the bench and one of the best pinch-hitters in baseball.

While his batting average was only .246 with Atlanta with seven homers and 31 RBIs, he came up big in clutch situations, hitting .273 with two outs and runners in scoring position, .310 in late-and-close situations, and .300 in the ninth inning. He led the majors with three pinch-hit homers (third on the Braves' all-time single-season list), 18 pinch-hit RBIs, and 17 pinch-walks. His 18 pinch-hits were second in the majors, behind the 22 recorded by Philadelphia's Greg Dobbs.

"The average overall wasn't that great to look at. I know that my pinch-hit numbers were better than when I played," said Norton, who leads all pinch-hitters in homers (13) and RBIs (64) since the start of the 2001 season (his 81 pinch-hits are fifth). "My role is to help late in the game. My thought process is not really what you average, it's how many pinch-hits you get throughout the year.

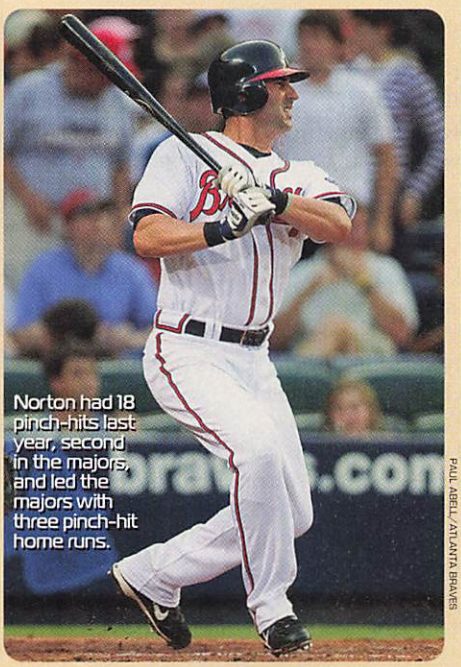
"Being the left-handed guy off the bench was something I was accustomed to in Colorado (where he played from 2001 through 2003), but that was really the only time I had done it," he added. "But working with [Terry Pendleton] and with Bobby giving me the opportunity to get out there on almost a daily basis and getting an at-bat and playing some left [field] or whatever, I think things worked out pretty well."



Norton started games at three positions last year, including six at first base.

PAUL ABELL/ATLANTA BRAVES

A California native who attended the University of Oklahoma, Norton seemed to be working out well in Seattle, where he started the 2008 season. He was hitting .438 (seven-for-16) in the six games he appeared in for the Mariners. But he was designated for assignment on April 30 - a move that surprised him and many Mariners fans and media - before being traded to the Braves.



Norton had 18 pinch-hits last year, second in the majors, and led the majors with three pinch-hit home runs.

PAUL ABELL/ATLANTA BRAVES

He got off to a great start with Atlanta, driving in the game-winning run in his second Braves at-bat, May 7, with a seventh-inning, bases-loaded single. Then, the next day, he lined a pinch-hit, two-run single, again with the bases loaded, this time in the sixth, to help rally the Braves from a 4-1 deficit to a 5-4 victory.

"It was nice to start like that, with those two basehits in the first three games," he said. "You want to come to a new team, you want to show them that they made a good trade, that you are a good player."

He showed he was a good guy in the clubhouse right away, too, despite being in uncharted territory. Even though he'd played with five other teams since being a second-round draft pick of the White Sox in 1993, it was the first time he'd been traded or changed teams during the season.

"This was the only team that I've ever played for that I hadn't played with one player on the team," recalled Norton. "Going to Seattle, Detroit, and Colorado, there were guys that I played with and knew. I didn't know anybody on this team."

Even meeting Cox was interesting.

"The first day I got there, in the clubhouse, I didn't know whether to call him Sir, or Skip or Bobby or anything like that," he recalled. "I was kind of awestruck, I guess you could say. Playing for a [future] Hall of

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

PAUL ABELL/ATLANTA BRAVES

BY KEN ROSENTHAL

ANGELS HOPE TO RE-UP RELIABLE LACKEY SOON

THE ANGELS have yet to begin serious talks with ace righthander **John Lackey** about a contract extension, but expect to hold such discussions before the start of the season. Lackey, 30, likely would be the top starting pitcher in next year's free-agent class. He has a string of six seasons winning in double-figures and has been far more durable than righthander **A.J. Burnett**, who commanded a five-year, $82.5 million free-agent contract from the Yankees. The career statistics of the two pitchers are virtually identical.

John Smoltz's performance bonuses with the Red Sox provide little incentive for him to return before June. Smoltz will earn $125,000 the first day he is on the active roster and $35,000 each day from June 1 to Oct. 3. He also will receive $500,000 if he is active on Oct. 4, the final day of the regular season, and $500,000 if he is named Comeback Player of the Year.

Lefthander **Randy Wolf** declined to accept a three-year, $28.5 million offer to return to the Astros – an offer that was rescinded early in the off-season. The 32-year-old veteran looked like a good bet to return to the Dodgers if the Mets re-signed **Oliver Perez**, but was unlikely to command an average salary of $9.5 million from either team.

Oliver Perez, 27, has terrific stuff, and Mets officials hope that he might gain maturity after getting married this off-season. But other teams remain wary. Perez led the NL in walks last season and also had the worst ground-ball ratio in the league. He has yet to produce back-to-back 30-start seasons.

A number of big-name free agents were facing the possibility of retirement if they did not accept diminished salaries and reduced roles. The Rangers, in need of a right-handed slugger, planned to bypass **Frank Thomas** and **Nomar Garciaparra** in order to stick with the left-handed **Hank Blalock**. The Phillies showed interest in Garciaparra as a right-handed bench player.

The Rockies could entertain offers for third baseman **Garrett Atkins** in spring training if first baseman **Todd Helton** recovers well from lower back surgery and the team's young players show signs of maturing. If Helton progresses slowly, Atkins could open the season at first with **Ian Stewart** at third.

Brewers general manager **Doug Melvin** joked that he no longer can trade centerfielder **Mike Cameron**, who turned out to be an excellent recruiter for free-agent closer **Trevor Hoffman**, a former teammate of Cameron's with the Padres. The Brewers had discussed sending Cameron to the Yankees for **Melky Cabrera**, but given the uncertainty surrounding the team's pitching staff, Melvin says he values Cameron's defense in center field.

Former Braves righthander **Paul Byrd** (1997-98, 2004) isn't retiring. But he also will not be playing baseball at the start of the season. Byrd, a free agent, says he will remain home with his family in Alpharetta, then possibly join a contender at mid-season. He doesn't want to spend another full season away from his wife, **Kym**, and sons **Grayson**, 12, and **Colby**, 11.

- KEN ROSENTHAL IS A SENIOR WRITER FOR FOXSPORTS.COM

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Fame manager, it's obviously an honor."

He credited his teammates for making him feel at home right away.

"I got to the field real early [May 6]. Jeff Francoeur was the first guy in there and was real nice," he said. "John Smoltz offered rides, showed me around the Alpharetta area. It says a lot for a future Hall of Famer, a guy of that stature, to pick up a new guy at the house and drive him around. It was a bunch of good guys in that clubhouse. It wasn't hard to fit in at all."

He fit in so well that he earned his share of ribbing for his demeanor.

"I don't talk a whole lot," he said. "I know [Brian McCann] gives me some grief about just kind of sitting there looking miserable on the bench while I'm watching the game."

He may have looked miserable, but he was always ready to answer Cox's call to action, any time and anywhere. Norton, who made his big league debut for the White Sox on Aug. 18, 1996, showed his versatility, playing 10 games (six starts) at first base, 25 (15 starts) in left field and making one start in right.

As he got better acclimated to the Braves, Norton became a bigger part of the late-game strategy, eventually earning the role of the primary left-handed bat off the bench. He did some of his best hitting after the All-Star break.

He hit .323 (20-for-62), with five homers, 17 RBIs and a .462 on-base percentage after the break, and, as a pinch-hitter, he reached base in 16 of his final 32 plate appearances, getting eight hits and receiving eight walks (including intentional walks in three straight games), while batting .316.

Norton, who played in his 1,000th career game in the first game of the Sept. 13 doubleheader at Shea Stadium (he drew an intentional walk as part of a game-winning, three-run, eighth-inning rally) is eager to participate in his first Braves spring training, and made sure he'd be ready by doing his usual off-season training regimen.

"I've been playing for a long time, so my trainer and I have a good idea of what I want to do as far as my workload and what things are more beneficial to me," he said. "It's not like all the running that I do or plyometrics or whatever is going to help me steal any bases. I run the way I run, and I'm not going to get any faster at 36. So you just try to stay healthy, get a good base with the lifting and core exercises, get your swing down and just be in shape when you report in the spring. We'll see how spring training is."

VAZQUEZ BRINGS NEEDED RELIABILITY

© RON VESELY/CHICAGO WHITE SOX

Vazquez is one of just 11 pitchers who were active last year that had 125 career wins through their age 31 season.

BY STEVE FALL

WHEN THE BRAVES ran off 14 straight division titles, quality durable starting pitchers played a huge role. After enduring numerous injuries to starters last season, trading for Javier Vazquez marks an attempt to rebuild the rotation in that mold of 1991-2005.

Vazquez has made at least 32 starts in each of the past nine seasons. Since 1990, only Greg Maddux (13, from 1996 through 2008) and Tom Glavine (12, 1996-07) had longer runs of 32-start seasons. Both pitchers began their streaks in Atlanta under Bobby Cox.

Vazquez also recorded 150 strikeouts every year from 2000 through 2008. Only two other pitchers – Pedro Martinez (11, 1995-05) and Roger Clemens (10, 1996-05) – had longer runs of 150-K seasons since 1990. Both Martinez and Clemens are headed for the Hall of Fame.

Concluding last season with 2,015 strikeouts made Vazquez one of 17 pitchers to strike out at least 2,000 batters through his age-31 season (based on age as of July 1). The list includes greats like Walter Johnson, Nolan Ryan, Sandy Koufax, Tom Seaver, Martinez and Clemens.

Of course, Vazquez falls short of the other pitchers on that list in ERA (4.32) and victories (127). In fact, among the 63 pitchers to strike out 2,000 batters in history, Vazquez enters 2009 with the highest ERA. Only Jamie Moyer (4.19) and David Wells (4.13) also have ERAs over 4.00.

Vazquez is one of just two members of the 2,000-strikeout club with a career winning percentage below .500 (.496). He joins Bobo Newsom (.487) with this distinction. However, with a 127-129 record entering the season, he could easily move back over .500.

The 127 career victories make Vazquez one of 11 pitchers active last season to notch 125 wins through their age-31 season. That list is filled with current and former Braves: Tim Hudson, John Smoltz, Glavine, Maddux, Mike Hampton, Mike Mussina, Martinez, Andy Pettitte, Roy Halladay and Roy Oswalt.

Advancing a runner from second to third base with nobody out is considered the kind of maneuver made by smart, savvy veterans. But last season, a rookie performed best among all Braves in this area. Gregor Blanco faced this situation eight times and moved the runner to third – or all the way home – each time.

That information is made possible by researching data available at retrosheet.org, where every play of the 2008 season is available. Since moving a runner from second to third with none out has minimal impact in one-sided games, only those executed with the Braves leading or trailing by three or fewer runs got considered. Plate appearances that resulted in walks and hit batters – which pass the same situation on to the next hitter – were also excluded.

Greg Norton, in addition to his impressive hitting off the bench, excelled at advancing runners from second with nobody out. He moved the runner to third all five times he had the opportunity. Casey Kotchman came through in all four of his chances with the Braves. Brian McCann (10-13, 76.9 percent), Yunel Escobar (9-12, 75.0) and Kelly Johnson (9-12, 75.0) also excelled.

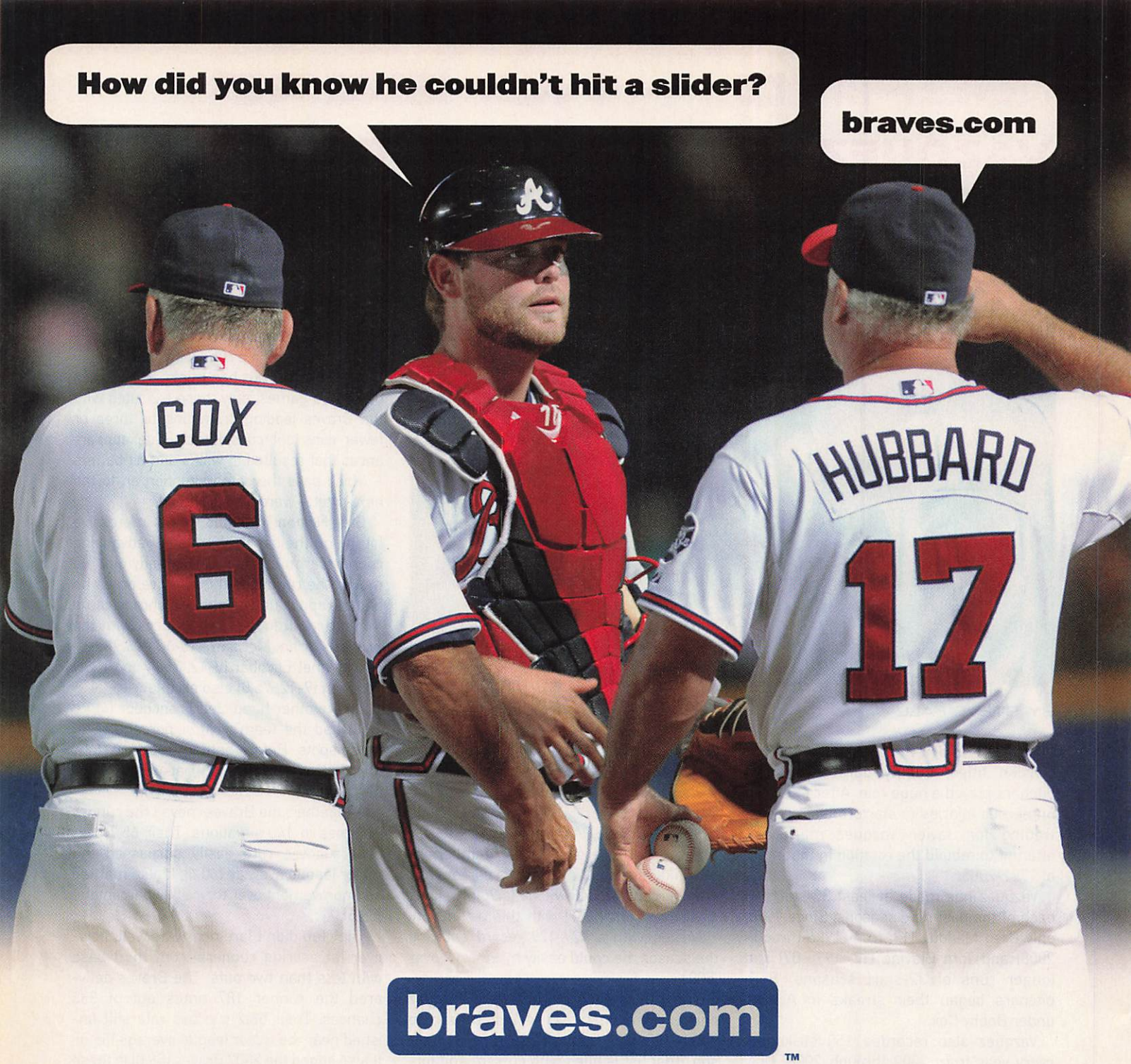
On the other hand, Jeff Francoeur (4-13, 30.8) had the team's worst percentage in these spots. Before getting traded in July, Mark Teixeira (4-10, 40.0) also had a low percentage.

Altogether, the Braves moved the runner 92 times in 140 situations. Their 65.7 percent success rate easily surpassed the major league average (60.6). It also marked an improvement over their 2007 percentage (58.5).

The club didn't fare nearly as well, however, at scoring runners from third base with less than two outs. The Braves delivered the runner 187 times out of 333 chances. Their 56.2 success rate still finished near the major league average (56.6). It also edged the 2007 Braves (56.0) in these situations.

Martin Prado came through all 11 times he batted in these spots last season. Matt Diaz (7-10, 70.0) and Kotchman (7-10, 70.0) did well in their limited chances to drive in runners from third with less than two outs. Chipper Jones (17-25, 68.0), Teixeira (12-18, 66.7) and Omar Infante (17-26, 65.4) also performed well.

Francoeur struggled in these situations, too, bringing home just 21 of 49 runners (42.9). His percentage did top those of Escobar (11-26, 42.3) and Norton (5-13, 38.5).



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Smoltz Opts For Boston's Up-Front Money Over Wren's Incentive-Laden Deal

SURPRISE EXIT

BY MARK BOWMAN
OF MLB.COM

Frank Wren long made it known that he was interested in re-signing John Smoltz if the veteran pitcher proved capable of being effective while returning from major shoulder surgery.

Having experienced nothing but frustration this past season with a starting rotation that consisted of two 40-somethings (Smoltz and Tom Glavine) and the oft-injured Mike Hampton, Wren had no desire to roll the dice with his starters for a second consecutive season.

Even if it meant facing the public backlash that began late Jan. 7, when it was learned that Smoltz opted to end his 21-season career in Atlanta to chase the greater guarantee that was being offered in Boston.

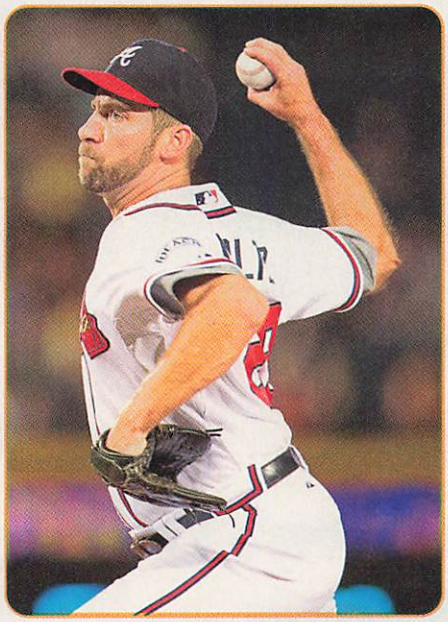
"We were willing to pay John as much or more than the Red Sox to pitch," Wren said. "We just weren't willing to pay him as much as the Red Sox were to not pitch."

Smoltz, who will turn 42 May 15, had his shoulder surgically repaired in June after appearing in only 6 games (5 starts) and now finds himself with a shoulder that is bound together with five anchors. This and the fact that Dr. James Andrews found significant damage proved worrisome for the Braves.

Bobby Cox was impressed with what he saw when Smoltz threw off a mound for the first time since his surgery on Dec. 5. But Wren never gained enough confidence to provide the kind of guarantee that the Red Sox had the luxury of providing.

The Red Sox lured Smoltz away from Atlanta with a guaranteed $5.5 million contract that includes incentives that could increase his 2009 earnings to $10 million. In other words, those $5.5 million will be gained whether or not Smoltz throws a single pitch.

The guaranteed portion of the offer provided by the Braves was in the neighborhood of $2 million. A source familiar with the offer confirmed that Smoltz's earnings could have risen to $12 million if he'd maximized all of the incentives in the offer provided by Wren.



Smoltz recorded his 3,000th career strikeout in his final home start as a Brave.

With Atlanta's offer, Smoltz would have received a $1 million bonus the day he was placed on the active roster and subsequent $1 million bonuses for each 30-day period that he remained on the roster. There were also bonuses available based on appearances and accomplishments, such as Cy Young votes and an All-Star selection.

"We appreciate what John has done for the franchise. We loved having him as part of our franchise," Wren said. "One of the most difficult times in this business is when star players get older. We couldn't pin our hopes on the surgically-repaired shoulder of a 42-year-old pitcher."

Obviously, to maximize the incentives offered by Wren, Smoltz would have had to remain healthy for the entire season. The Braves weren't given reason to believe he'd be ready to pitch before June 1, which is when he's told others that he'll likely join Boston's starting rotation.

Smoltz has told some of his former Braves teammates that he felt the incentives in Boston's offer were easier to attain than the ones he would have had with Atlanta's offer.

"There were large discrepancies between the offer from the Braves and offers from other teams," Smoltz said through a statement issued by his agents at Career Sports & Entertainment.

While Wren took heat from fans and others who believed Smoltz should have been given the benefit of the doubt with his health, there are some who wondered if Smoltz was simply anxious for the opportunity to experience baseball outside of Atlanta and improve his odds of winning another world championship before retiring.

Whatever the case, Smoltz will certainly be missed by many of those who had the opportunity to marvel at his athletic ability and the great heart he showed both in competition and through his many charitable community endeavors.

Cox, who as general manager orchestrated the 1987 trade that brought Smoltz to Atlanta, was saddened with the news. In fact, he called Smoltz early Jan. 8 and asked him to give to it a second thought.

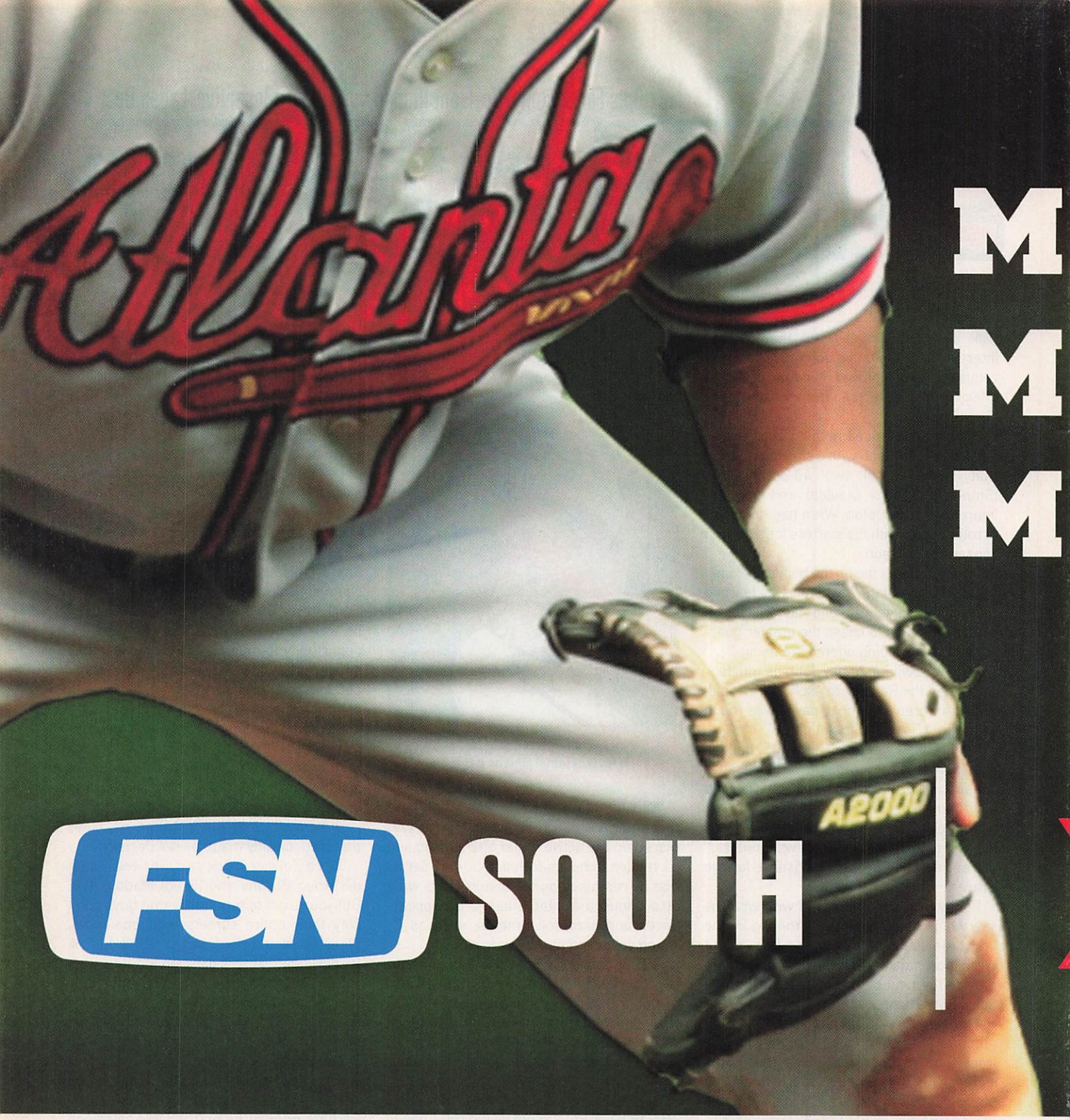
But Smoltz told his longtime manager that he'd already made a final decision.

"It's a downer," Cox said. "It feels like it did when Glavine and [Greg] Maddux left. But you've got to remember that guys don't play their entire careers with one team. Willie Mays and Hank Aaron didn't do it. A lot of Hall of Famers don't do it."

Smoltz, who is the only pitcher to ever record 200 wins and 150 saves in a career, has compiled credentials that many believe already make him a lock for Cooperstown.

Along with owning a major league record with 15 post-season wins, he is one of 16 pitchers to ever record 3,000 strikeouts. Perhaps fittingly, he reached this milestone while making his final home start for the Braves last April 22.

"I have always loved the city of Atlanta, and it will always be my home," Smoltz said in his statement. "I will cherish my 21 years with Bobby Cox and all my Braves' teammates. I continue to wish the Atlanta Braves nothing but success in the future."



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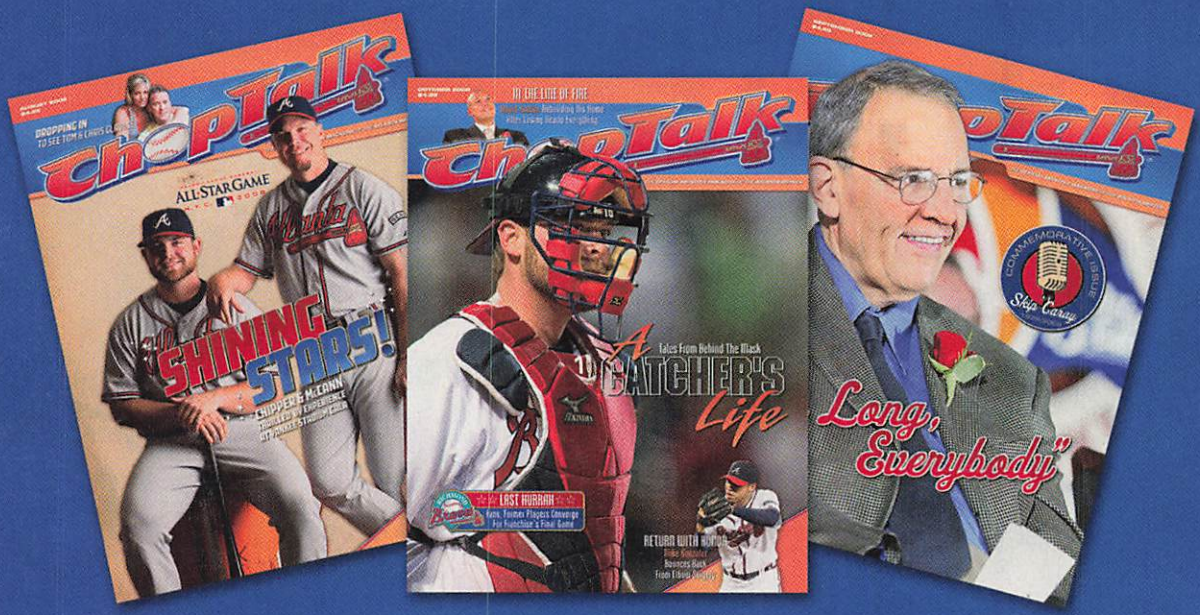


April 2005	Starting Rotation
May 2005	Andruw Jones
June 2005	Tim Hudson
July 2005	Kyle Davies
August 2005	Johnson & Langerhans
September 2005	Jeff Francoeur
October 2005	Andruw Jones
November 2005	Brian McCann
December 2005	Andruw Jones
January 2006	Edgar Renteria
February 2006	Niekro, Aaron, Lemaster
March 2006	LaRoche Family
April 2006	Andruw, Smoltz, Chipper
May 2006	Chris Reitsma
June 2006	Francoeur's Slam

July 2006	Edgar Renteria
August 2006	Brian McCann
September 2006	Bob Wickman
October 2006	John Smoltz
November 2006	Bobby Cox
December 2006	Jeff Francoeur
January 2007	Rafael Soriano
February 2007	Spring Training
March 2007	Mike Gonzalez
April 2007	Andruw Jones (Sold Out)
May 2007	Hubbard & Johnson (Sold Out)
June 2007	John Smoltz
July 2007	Diaz & Harris
August 2007	Edgar Renteria
September 2007	Mark Teixeira
October 2007	Jeff Francoeur

November 2007	Chipper Jones
December 2007	John Smoltz
January 2008	Tom Glavine
February 2008	Tim Hudson
March 2008	Mark Kotsay
April 2008	Teixeira & Jones
May 2008	Brian McCann
June 2008	Jair Jurrjens
July 2008	Chipper Jones
August 2008	McCann & Jones
September 2008	Skip Caray
October 2008	Brian McCann
November 2008	Chipper Jones
December 2008	Pete Van Wieren
January 2009	Frank Wren

STAT PARADE 2008

INDIVIDUAL BATTING (MOST)

Hitting Streak	22 Games	Johnson Sept. 1-24
Home Run Streak	3 Games	Teixeira May 31-June 2
RBI Streak	5 Games	Teixeira (April 23-27)
Runs, Game	3 (13 Times)	Last: Francoeur Sept. 27 at Hou.
Hits, Game	5	Kotsay Aug. 14 vs. Chi.
Total Bases, Game	12	Teixeira June 22 vs. Sea.
Doubles, Game	3 (twice)	Last: McCann Sept. 24 at Phi.
Home Runs, Game	3	Teixeira June 22 vs. Sea.
Walks, Game	4	C. Jones, July 6 vs. Hou. (17 inn.)
RBIs, Game	7	Francoeur April 12 at Wash.
Strikeouts, Game	4 (4 Times)	Last: Johnson Aug. 9 at Ariz.

CLUB BATTING (MOST)

Runs, Game	16	Sept. 2 at Fla.
Runs, Game, Both Clubs	30	Sept. 2 at Fla.
Runs, Inning	9	July 26 at Phi. (4th)
Hits, Game	21	Sept. 2 at Fla.
Hits, Game, Both Clubs	36 (twice)	Last: Sept. 2 at Fla.
Hits, Inning	7 (twice)	Last: Sept. 27 at Hou. (2nd)
Total Bases, Game	37	April 17 at Fla.
At-Bats, Game	65	July 6 vs. Hou.
Doubles, Game	7	May 3 at Cin.
Triples, Game	2	Aug. 19 at NYM
Home Runs, Game	5	April 17 at Fla.
Home Runs, Game, Both Clubs	7	July 27 at Phi.
Home Runs, Inning	3	April 17 at Fla. (5th)
Extra-Base Hits, Game	11	April 17 at Fla.
Walks, Game	11 (twice)	Latest: July 6 vs. Hou.
Strikeouts, Game	18 (17 inn.)	July 6 vs. Hou.
Strikeouts, Game (9 inn.)	13 (twice)	Last: June 29 at Tor.
Steals, Game	3 (three times)	Last: Sept. 20 vs. NYM
Left On Base, Game	21 (17 inn.)	July 6 vs. Hou.

INDIVIDUAL PITCHING (MOST)

Innings, Game, Starter	9	Hudson May 2 vs. Cin.
Innings, Game, Reliever	4.1	Carlyle June 23 vs. Mil.
Runs Allowed, Game, Starter	8 (Twice)	Last: Morton July 28 vs. St.L.
Runs Allowed, Game, Reliever	6 (Twice)	Last: DeSalvo Aug. 22 at St.L.
Strikeouts, Game, Starter	10 (4 Times)	Last: Jurrjens Sept. 11 vs. Col.
Strikeouts, Game, Reliever	5	Carlyle July 1 vs. Phi.
Consecutive Scoreless IP	20.1	Campillo May 8-29
Consecutive Homerless IP	33.1	Hudson April 21-May 17
Winning Streak, Starter	4 (Twice)	Last: Campillo July 13-Aug. 8

CLUB PITCHING (MOST)

Runs Allowed, Game	18	Aug. 22 at St.L.
Runs Allowed, Inning	7	Sept. 26 at Phi. (5th)
Strikeouts, Game	16	April 17 at Fla.
Walks Allowed, Game	11	May 25 vs. Ariz.
Hits Allowed, Game	26	Aug. 22 at St.L.
Home Runs Allowed, Game	5 (3 Times)	Last: Sept. 6 vs. Wash,
Consecutive Homerless IP	44.1	Mar. 31-April 7

OUTFIELD ASSISTS

Francoeur	14
Blanco	7
Kotsay	3
Diaz	2
B. Jones	2

AVERAGE INNINGS PER START

Hudson	6.1
Jurrjens	6.0
Hampton	6.0
Campillo	5.1
Smoltz	5.1
Reyes	5.0
Morton	5.0
Glavine	5.0
James	4.2
Parr	4.1
Bennett	4.0

Jair Jurrjens averaged 6 innings per start, second on the team, and tied for the club lead with a 10-strike-out game.

PAUL ABELL/ATLANTA BRAVES

GAME-WINNING RBIs

McCann	10
Teixeira	9
Escobar	8
C. Jones	7
Francoeur	7
Johnson	6
Kotsay	5
Norton	4
Blanco	4

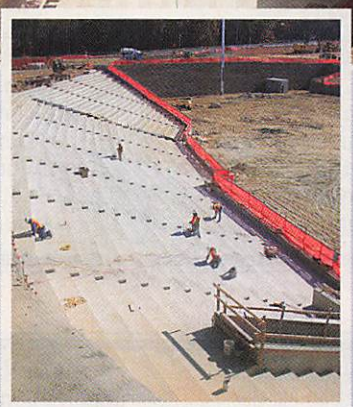
BY BILL BALLEW

WORK ON GWINNETT PARK ONGOING FROM DAWN TO DUSK AND BEYOND

NO ONE NEEDS TO REMIND the Gwinnett Braves front office that Opening Day of the Triple-A club's inaugural home schedule is Friday, April 17, at 7 p.m. against the Norfolk Tides. With that date set in stone, construction on the new state-of-the-art ballpark is ongoing around the clock, all with the intent of being ready for business during the second week of the International League season (the team opens at Charlotte April 9 and plays its first 8 games on the road).

"There's changes made every day at the ballpark," said Bill Blackwell, assistant general manager of the G-Braves. "If you miss a day, the next time you go out there, it's like, wow! But it's getting time where that needs to be happening. Right now we're a little bit ahead of schedule. Bad weather isn't really delaying us. It's going to be close, but everything is pointing to an April 1 completion date."

PHOTOS: GWINNETT BRAVES



The construction process has taken several noticeable steps in recent weeks. The concrete bowl was completed in early November, and the roof was finished in December. The installation of seats began in January. The drainage systems for the infield and outfield were scheduled for January and early February. The sod will be placed in early March.

"It's very hectic, as you can imagine, but it's also exciting to see everything come together," said Courtney Lawson, the team's public and community affairs manager. "Right now we're working in offices that are about 10 minutes from the ballpark. The plan is for the ticket people to get in first, because they are so essential. The rest of us will move as the construction process permits, but that probably won't be until early April."

The yet-to-be-named ballpark is the first phase of a planned community project that is expected to include office buildings, retail outlets and residential housing. The ballpark is being built along Buford Drive, about a mile and a half east of Interstate 85. Ticket sales have been brisk, which has the team anticipating a substantial increase over last year's attendance of 289,570 at The Diamond in Richmond.

"We've had over 3,500 deposits placed on tickets," Blackwell said. "The economy has had an effect, so many of those deposits will be used for partial season plans and individual game tickets. At the same time, we have about 2,000 full-season tickets that have been sold and expect to sell more over the next two months."

Fans throughout the Atlanta and northeast Georgia area are not the only ones looking forward to the Braves' new Triple-A digs. In addition to playing in a new facility, particularly compared to the outdated accommodations in Richmond, the players realize making the transition from Gwinnett to the major league team will not involve a tremendous change in their everyday lives.

"The situation is going to be a lot easier, especially for those guys who may move a couple of times between the two teams," said top pitching prospect Tommy Hanson. "From a living arrangement standpoint, you're not going to have to move. You can live in the same apartment, regardless of which team you're playing on, because it's not that far from Turner Field (35 minutes). Guys making the jump from Triple-A are going to be a lot more at ease, because that's one less thing they have to worry about."

In addition to the ballpark's construction, the team has completed several other items of interest. The most notable is the signing of a five-year radio deal with WDUN 550, which will broadcast all 144 games. Long-time WSB radio sports director Tony Schiavone will serve as the team's play-by-play man. He will be joined in the booth during home games by Judd Hickinbotham. Gwinnett will also televise approximately 25-30 games on CSS. The broadcast team for the TV games has not been finalized.

The team also named its new mascot, a "toothy whistlepig" designed by New York branding group SME. Jim Bennett of Lilburn was chosen the winner among the 5,109 entries of the name-the-mascot contest with his recommendation of "Chopper." The G-Braves are also holding auditions for an on-field master of ceremonies and hiring numerous other game-day personnel, including concessions workers, interns and other part-time staff.

"We had more than 2,000 resumes for our full-time positions," Blackwell said. "We're a little hesitant to have a job fair for our part-time or seasonal employment because of the numbers we might get. Still, we're going to hire about 200 people on a part-time basis, which should help some people who are looking to add to their income in this area."

MINOR LEAGUE STAFFS

The Braves' relocation of their Triple-A club will also involve some new faces on the International League team. While Dave Brundage will handle the managing chores for the third consecutive season, he will be assisted at Gwinnett by pitching coach Derek Botelho, hitting coach Jaime Dismuke and trainer Mike Graus. Botelho moves up from Double-A Mississippi, and Dismuke will make his debut with the organization after serving as a hitting coach in the Cincinnati Reds' organization since 1999.

Phillip Wellman, who was recently named Manager of the Year in the Atlanta organization by the Braves 400 Club, returns to guide Mississippi. Joining Wellman will be two other new instructors - pitching coach Marty Reed and hitting coach Roosevelt Brown. Reed spent the past nine seasons in the Los Angeles Dodgers' farm system, including the last three as the organization's pitching coordinator.

Brown, who retired as a player after spending the 2005 season with the Triple-A Charlotte Knights, begins his coaching career by returning to the organization where he originally signed. The Braves drafted Brown in the 20th round in 1993 out of Vicksburg (Miss.) High School. He spent four seasons in the minors with the Braves prior to being traded to the Florida Marlins for Terry Pendleton in 1996. He later spent parts of four seasons (1999-2002) in the major leagues as an outfielder with the Cubs and re-signed briefly with the Braves in 2005 before joining Charlotte.

At Advanced A Myrtle Beach, manager Rocket Wheeler and hitting coach Rick Albert return. They will be joined by pitching coach Guy Hansen, who drops down from the Triple-A ranks to the critical developmental role handled for the past decade by the late Bruce Dal Canton.

Randy Ingle will be Rome's manager for the fourth straight season and will once again have pitching coach Jim Czajkowski and hitting coach Bobby Moore.

At Danville, manager Paul Runge, hitting coach Carlos Mendez and pitching coach Derrick Lewis return. The Gulf Coast League staff also remains in place with manager Luis Ortiz, hitting coach Sixto Lezcano and pitching coach Gabe Luckert.

The Braves also announced that Luckie Dacosta will be the minor league strength and conditioning coordinator, and Matt Saltz will be the organization's assistant strength and conditioning coordinator.

MY PLAN IS TO WORK AND KEEP IMPROVING

EDITOR'S NOTE

Tommy Hanson had the best season of any Braves minor league pitcher last year while making the jump from advanced Class-A Myrtle Beach to Double-A Mississippi, where he threw a no-hitter. He then capped the year by being named MVP in the Arizona Fall League, the first pitcher in league history to win the award. The 6-6, 210-pound righthander will get a lot of attention in spring training.

WHEN I LOOK BACK on 2008, I don't think I could imagine it going any better than the way it went. I'm happy with what I was able to accomplish, the MVP honors in the Arizona Fall League and winning the Southern League championship and things like that. But I also consider all of that to be in the past. All of my focus is on the upcoming season and hopefully being with the big club at some point.

I am a little amazed about how much attention I seem to be receiving. It's cool to hear my name and fun to hear people talking about me. But a little bit of that goes a long way. I really try not to focus on that stuff, because I know it doesn't mean very much.

When I go out to pitch, all that matters is what I'm doing on the mound. All that other stuff isn't going to do anything to help me get the batter out. That's why even with all the attention, I'm not changing anything about the way I get ready for the season.

Several of my buddies have said this off-season that a couple of years ago I would have never expected to be where I'm at right now. The truth is, I never think about a couple of years down the road. My focus is simply to work hard while doing what I need to do to get better.

> "ALL OF MY FOCUS IS ON THE UPCOMING SEASON AND HOPEFULLY BEING WITH THE BIG CLUB AT SOME POINT."

Instead of looking to the future, as a pitcher you have to determine what you're doing right and wrong right now in order to get batters out. It's all about doing what you can right then in order to be a better pitcher. I'm pleased with the way I've been pitching these last couple of years, but I know there's still a lot of work that has to be done.

When I signed with the Braves (2006), my best pitch was my slider. I threw a curveball, too, but it wasn't nearly as good as my slider. The Braves, however, wanted me to focus on throwing my curveball, which is something they suggest to most young pitchers.

This year, when I got to Double-A, Bo (Mississippi pitching coach Derek Botelho) told me it was okay to start throwing the slider again. I was real happy about that. For some reason, I feel more comfortable throwing a slider than a curveball. Bo helped me throw it even better, and I give him a lot of the credit. He's awesome, and I still talk to him every week or two in the off-season.

This fall in Arizona, I really didn't try to change anything from the regular season. I worked on throwing my changeup a little bit more in order to become more consistent with it. It was one of those things where I was in a groove the entire time. I just felt comfortable, and everything seemed to come together.

As far as this spring is concerned, ever since I signed, pitching in Atlanta has always been my goal. That's where I want to be. Pitching in the farm system is fine, but the goal is to pitch in the big leagues with Atlanta. I really don't feel any pressure. I'm just going to go out and do my thing.

Whatever the Braves decide is fine with me. If they feel I need to go to Triple-A, that's fine. And if they decide to take me with the big club, that's even better.

I'm going to go out and pitch to the best of my ability, and whatever happens, happens.

SPRING TRAINING 2009

TICKETING

INDIVIDUAL TICKETS for the 2009 Atlanta Braves Spring Training home games at Disney's Wide World of Sports Complex in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., are on sale via Ticketmaster (407-839-3900), Ticketmaster.com and the Disney Wide World of Sports Complex box office. Prices range from $15 for general admission/lawn to $28 for Lower Reserved. There is a $4 per seat premium charge for games against the Yankees, Red Sox and Mets.

For information on season and group tickets, call (407) 939-GAME (4263), or visit disneysports.com/atlantabraves. Season tickets are priced from $255 to $425. Various mini-plans also are available.

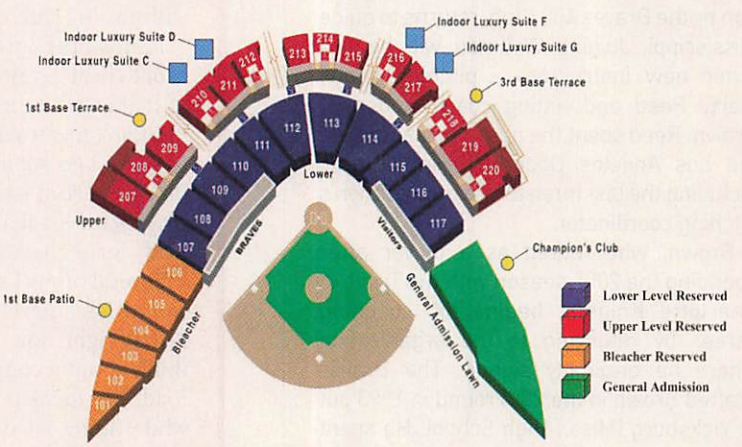
This schedule, including game times, is tentative and subject to change. No broadcast information was available at press time.

Tickets for the two exhibition games at Turner Field (April 3-4 vs. Detroit) also are on sale at braves.com, via Ticketmaster (1-800-745-3000), and at Publix Ticketmaster locations.

There are 18 games scheduled at Disney's 9,500-seat Champion Stadium, including World Baseball Classic exhibitions Mar. 3 (vs. Panama) and 5 (vs. Venezuela).

For more information on the travel packages that include game tickets and to book online, visit braves.com. Disney's Wide World of Sports is located just southwest of Orlando in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

CHAMPION STADIUM
AT DISNEY'S WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS



BROADCAST INFO TO BE ANNOUNCED.
GAME TIMES EASTERN AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE; ALL HOME GAMES @ CHAMPION STADIUM, DISNEY'S WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS

FEB/MARCH/APRIL

HOME | AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			25 1:05 PM DET @ Lakeland	26 1:05 PM HOU	27 1:05 PM PIT @ Bradenton	28 1:05 PM TOR @ Dunedin
1 1:05 PM PHI	2	3 1:05 PM *WBC Panama	4 1:05 PM NYY	5 1:05 PM *WBC Venezuela	6 7:05 PM HOU	7 1:15 PM NYY @ Tampa
8 1:05 PM PHI	9	10 1:05 PM HOU @ Kissimmee	11 1:05 PM PHI @ Clearwater	12 1:05 PM WAS	13 1:05 PM FLA @ Jupiter	14 1:05 PM STL @ Jupiter
15 1:05 PM HOU	16	17 1:05 PM NYM	18 1:10 PM NYM @ Port St. Lucie	19 7:05 PM DET	20 1:05 PM FLA	21 1:05 PM NYM
22 1:10 PM NYM @ Port St. Lucie	23	24 6:05 PM PIT	25 1:05 PM WAS @ Viera	26 1:05 PM TOR	27 1:05 PM DET	28 1:05 PM NYY
29 1:05 PM DET @ Lakeland	30 1:05 PM BOS	31 7:05 PM HOU @ Kissimmee	1 1:05 PM DET @ Lakeland	2 1:05 PM HOU @ Kissimmee	3 7:05 PM DET Turner Field	4 1:05 PM DET Turner Field

*WBC (World Baseball Classic)

ATLANTA BRAVES

TICKET INFO

At press time, the Braves had not released information about the sale of individual tickets for the 2009 season. However, fans interested in attending games against the Yankees (June 23-25) and/or Red Sox (June 26-28) at Turner Field should consider registering at braves.com for a chance to buy tickets to these games that will be in great demand. The only way to be guaranteed of getting tickets for these games is to purchase a ticket plan package. A limited number of individual seats will be available for these games, and a random drawing will be held among all those who register to determine who can buy whatever tickets are available for these six interleague games.

SEASON TICKETS DISCOUNT

Season tickets are on sale, and the Braves are offering something new for budget-conscious fans. An Upper Box full season ticket behind home plate is just $415 - $5 per game (gate price $12-$16).

Call (404) 577-9100 or visit braves.com for information on all season ticket plans, including half-season, weekend plans, 20-game plans, and season parking. Reservations and deposits also are being accepted for group ticket purchases.

MUSEUM & TOUR INFO

The Ivan Allen Jr. Braves Museum features more than 500 Braves artifacts that trace the team's history from its beginnings in Boston (1871-1952) to Milwaukee (1953-65) to Atlanta (1966-present). It is located on the northwest side of Turner Field at aisle 134. The museum opens two and a half hours before each game and closes in the middle of the seventh inning. The museum is open year-round and is the starting point of one-hour guided tours of Turner Field. Tours leave on the hour.

Tour reservations are not necessary for individuals or groups of less than 20 people. Tickets can be purchased the day of the tour at the main ticket window. Free parking in the Green lot.

Admission to the museum during games is one token ($2) and $5 on non-game days. Tour tickets are $12 for adults, $7 for children and $10 for groups of 20 or more. Walk-up tickets can be purchased at the ticket window. Groups of 20 or more and school groups must make reservations two weeks in advance by calling (404) 614-2311.

HOURS OF OPERATION

OCTOBER - MARCH	
Monday - Saturday	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
DEC. 23-JAN. 3	CLOSED
APRIL - OCTOBER	
Monday - Saturday	9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Sunday	1 - 3 p.m.

TOUR TICKETS

ADULTS	$12
CHILDREN 13 and Under	$7
MILITARY	$7
GROUP	$10

SCHOOL GROUP PRICES

CHILDREN	$5
ADULTS	$7

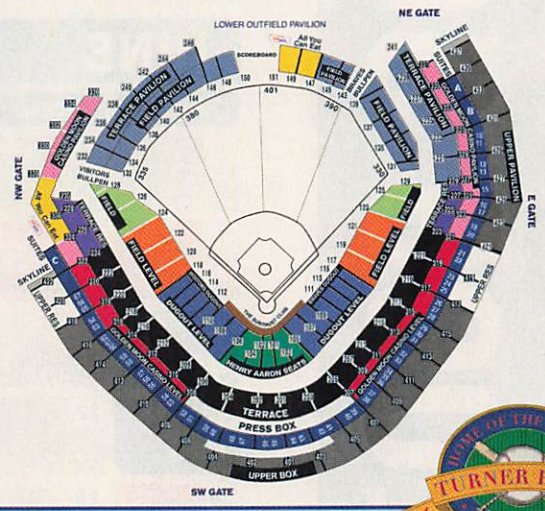
*Subject to change
Tours not available when the Braves have afternoon home games

GIVE A GIFT CARD

Braves Gift Cards are available in denominations from $25 to $250 and can be used to purchase Tickets, Concessions and Merchandise.

To purchase Gift Cards or to obtain more information, visit Braves.com or the Braves Clubhouse Store at CNN Center (call 404-523-5854).

TURNER FIELD SEATING



2009 SCHEDULE

GAME TIMES EASTERN, BROADCAST INFO TO BE ANNOUNCED.
TENTATIVE; SUBJECT TO CHANGE
FOR SEASON, GROUP AND SUITE TICKET INFORMATION CALL (404) 577-9100

APRIL

Braves — HOME — AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3 EXIBITION DET	4 EXIBITION DET
5 8:00 PM SEASON OPENER PHI ESPN2	6	7 7:00 PM PHI	8 1:00 PM PHI	9	10 HOME OPENER WSH	11 WSH
12 WSH	13	14 FLA	15 FLA	16 FLA	17 7:00 PM PIT	18 12:30 PM PIT
19 1:30 PM PIT	20 7:00 PM WSH	21 7:00 PM WSH	22 7:00 PM WSH	23	24 7:00 PM CIN	25 1:00 PM CIN
26 1:00 PM CIN	27 STL	28 STL	29 STL	30		

MAY

Braves — HOME — AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1 HOU	2 HOU
3 HOU	4 NYM	5 NYM	6 7:00 PM FLA	7 2:00 PM FLA	8 7:00 PM PHI	9 3:30 PM FOX PHI
10 1:30 PM PHI	11 7:00 PM NYM	12 7:00 PM NYM	13 1:00 PM NYM	14	15 ARI	16 ARI
17 ARI	18 COL	19 COL	20 COL	21 COL	22 TOR	23 TOR
24 TOR	25 4:00 PM SF	26 10:00 PM SF	27 10:00 PM SF	28 9:30 PM ARI	29 9:30 PM ARI	30 TBA ARI
31 4:00 PM ARI						

JUNE

Braves — HOME — AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2 CHC	3 CHC	4 CHC	5 MIL	6 MIL
7 MIL	8 PIT	9 PIT	10 PIT	11 PIT	12 7:00 PM BAL	13 7:00 PM BAL
14 1:30 PM BAL	15	16 7:00 PM CIN	17 7:00 PM CIN	18 12:30 PM CIN	19 7:00 PM BOS	20 7:00 PM BOS
21 1:30 PM BOS	22	23 NYY	24 NYY	25 NYY	26 BOS	27 BOS
28 BOS	29	30 PHI				

2009 SCHEDULE

JULY

HOME AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1 PHI	2 PHI	3 6:30 PM WAS	4 TBA WAS
5 1:30 PM WAS	6 8:00 PM CHC	7 8:00 PM CHC	8 2:00 PM CHC	9 8:30 PM COL	10 9:00 PM COL	11 8:00 PM COL
12 3:00 PM COL	13	14 ST. LOUIS ALL-STAR GAME	15	16 NYM	17 MYM	18 NYM
19 NYM	20 SF	21 SF	22 SF	23 SF	24 8:00 PM MIL	25 7:00 PM MIL
26 2:00 PM MIL	27	28 7:00 PM FLA	29 7:00 PM FLA	30 7:00 PM FLA	31 LA	

AUGUST

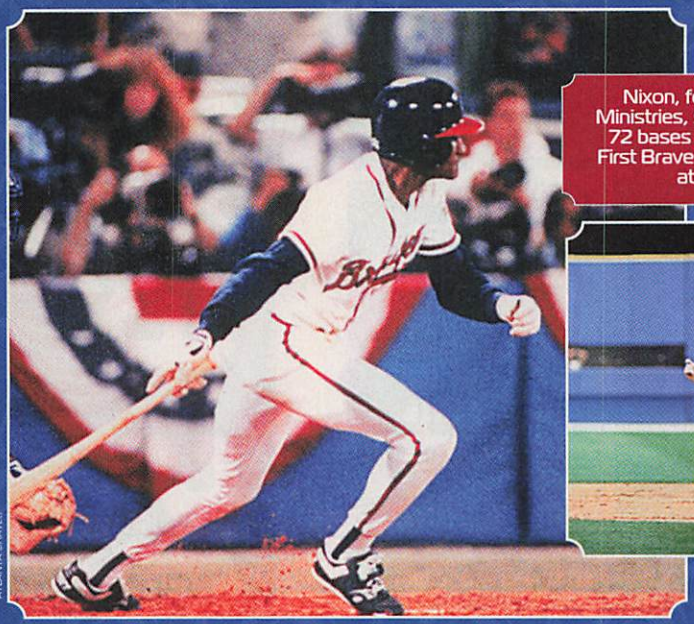
HOME AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1 LA
2 LA	3 10:00 PM SD	4 10:00 PM SD	5 3:30 PM SD	6 10:00 PM LA	7 10:00 PM LA	8 10:00 PM LA
9 4:00 PM LA	10	11 WAS	12 WAS	13	14 PHI	15 PHI
16 PHI	17	18 7:00 PM NYM	19 7:00 PM NYM	20 7:00 PM NYM	21 FLA	22 FLA
23 FLA	24	25 SD	26 SD	27 SD	28 7:00 PM PHI	29 7:00 PM PHI
30 1:30 PM PHI	31 7:00 PM FLA					

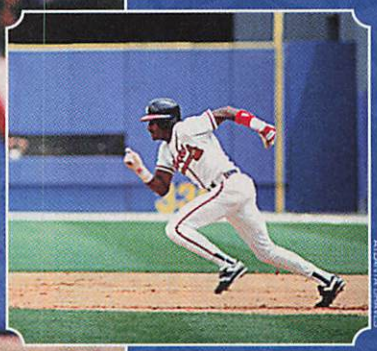
SEPT./OCT.

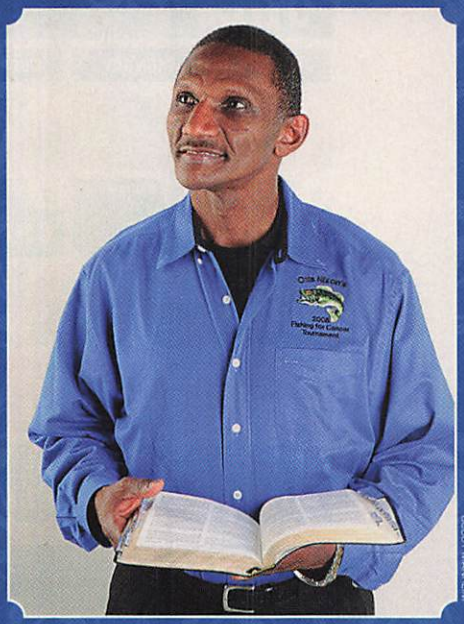
HOME AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 7:00 PM FLA	2 7:00 PM FLA	3 7:00 PM FLA	4 CIN	5 CIN
6 CIN	7	8 8:00 PM HOU	9 8:00 PM HOU	10 8:00 PM HOU	11 8:00 PM STL	12 TBA STL FOX
13 2:00 PM STL	14	15 NYM	16 NYM	17 NYM	18 PHI	19 PHI
20 PHI	21 7:00 PM NYM	22 7:00 PM NYM	23 7:00 PM NYM	24	25 7:00 PM WAS	26 1:00 PM WAS
27 1:30 PM WAS	28 FLA	29 FLA	30 FLA	1 WAS	2 WAS	3 WAS
4 WAS						



Nixon, founder of On-Track Ministries, stole an Atlanta record 72 bases for the 1991 Worst to First Braves and was a sparkplug atop the lineup.





STILL FIGHTING

Otis Nixon Helping Others Combat Addiction While He Does The Same

BY BRIAN KNAPP

OTIS NIXON wants the world to know he's a recovering drug addict. In fact, he reminds someone of that on an almost daily basis.

The 50-year-old former Braves centerfielder founded On-Track Ministries – a faith-based organization dedicated to helping people in the throes of addiction – shortly after his playing career ended in 1999. As part of his effort, he travels the country, speaking to schools, churches and even corporations about his struggle to stay clean. Consider it the cross he carries.

"When I retired from baseball, I thought I'd just sit back and enjoy retirement, but I found a different twist," Nixon said. "I found myself dealing with issues in my real life – in my past – that had to do with addiction. My calling's to go back and help people with addiction, whether it's addiction to drugs, addiction to drinking, addiction to food... whatever it is."

Based out of the Bethany Christian Center in Loganville, Ga., Nixon believes his first-hand experience with drugs and other vices gives him an upper hand when he discusses similar issues with people afflicted by their own demons.

"When people know you've gone through what they're going through, they break down," Nixon said. "I don't beat people across the head with the Bible, but I do minister to people's needs. You have to listen to people sometimes."

Nixon's past history with addiction has been well-chronicled.

In 1987, while playing in the Cleveland Indians organization, he was arrested on drug charges. Four years later, he received a 60-day suspension from Major League Baseball in wake of a positive drug test. The latter misstep cost him the tail end of Atlanta's magical run to the National League pennant and an opportunity to play in the 1991 post-season, which ended with the Braves losing a memorable seven-game World Series to the Minnesota Twins.

Nixon has not steered clear of the law in retirement, either. He was twice arrested in 2004 and charged with aggravated assault and sexual battery. He declined to comment on his most-recent run-ins with authorities.

"I made mistakes in my life, but I can use them to show others how to overcome their mistakes and correct their errors," Nixon said. "When I tell people what I'm doing, they want to hear about it."

In addition to his work with On-Track Ministries – the first two letters of which were derived from his initials – Nixon hosts an annual "Fishing for Cancer" benefit. He also plans to publish a book, "Keeping it Real," in March and aims to promote its release by touring stadiums of the teams he played for during his 17-year career.

Meanwhile, Nixon expects to earn his master's degree in divinity from the Kingdom Bridge Builders School of Ministry this year and has designs on pursuing a doctorate upon graduation.

"I did have a great career, but my destiny was not to be a baseball player. I'm an evangelist," he said. "If you go through something, you have a lot of insight and knowledge you can give back to people who are going through the same thing. Mine was a spiritual calling. It sounds a little different than what you'd expect from a baseball player, but this is what's in my heart, in my veins. I believe I've been chosen to do this work."

Such dedication served him well as a player.

Originally a third-round pick of the Yankees in the 1979 draft,

Nixon played for nine teams in 17 years, but he found a home during the four seasons (1991-93, 1999) he spent in Atlanta. He batted .277 with the Braves (7 points higher than his career average), scoring 268 runs and stealing 186 bases in 462 games. A force atop the Atlanta lineup, he set a team record with 72 steals in 1991. Part of that total was a National League single-game record for stolen bases (6), set against the Montreal Expos.

"I was fortunate to play on a lot of great teams and had a lot of great teammates," said Nixon, who ranks 16th on the all-time list for stolen bases (620). "It was awesome. That's why I still live here in Atlanta. People see me as a Brave. I couldn't see myself anywhere else."

Nixon remains best known for a dazzling catch he made on July 25, 1992, when he leaped above the right-center field wall at Atlanta Fulton-County Stadium and robbed Pittsburgh's Andy Van Slyke of a ninth-inning home run to preserve a 1-0 victory.

"That catch was my signature moment," he said. "They play that when I go to churches, when I go into schools. It opens up conversation. People say it's one of the top 10 catches of all-time. It was a home run that would have cost us the game. We had a 13-game winning streak going. We had a full house, and you couldn't hear anything but the crowd after it happened. It amazes me when I go back and look at it."

Following the 1993 season, Nixon used free agency to sign with Boston and bounced around between leagues and teams before finishing his career as a Brave in 1999. The city of Atlanta and the Braves organization left an indelible mark on his life. That experience has become a centerpiece for his ministry.

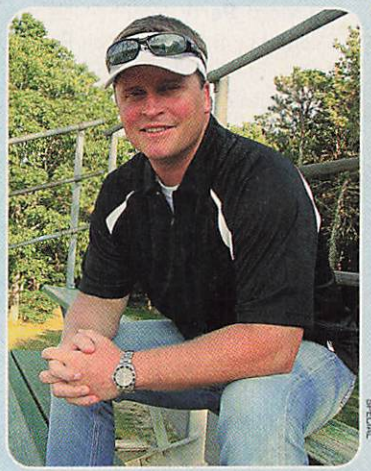
"I had a lot of support from John Schuerholz, from my teammates, from Bobby Cox. Even going through my blunders, the city embraced me. That's why I'm grounded today," said Nixon, who appeared in 6 post-season series with the Braves, batting .321 in 81 at-bats and stealing 11 bases in 24 games. "It says in the Bible that your testimony will be your strongest ministry. What I went through is what I share with people. There's something about a person who can come back from something much stronger than they were before."

A divorced father of three, he became a grandfather for the first time in 2008 and now resides in the Atlanta suburbs.

For information on On-Track Ministries, visit otisnixon.com where there's also a video of The Catch, complete with Skip Caray's exciting call.

HOW I MADE IT TO THE MAJORS

B.B. ABBOTT
BASEBALL AGENT



BY STEVE FALL

DURING THE LATE 1970s and early 1980s, the Dodgers and Reds were fierce rivals. The impact reached as far away as Pierson, Florida, where both a future Hall of Famer and a sports agent were growing up in a town of 2,600 people.

"I was a big Cincinnati Reds fan, and Chipper was a huge Dodgers fan," said baseball agent B.B. Abbott, who now represents his childhood friend, Chipper Jones. "He would imitate the Dodgers' lineup. I would imitate the Reds' lineup. And we'd go through it. The Reds and the Dodgers had many epic battles in Chipper's backyard."

Today, Abbott's firm - Jet Sports Management - represents 37 professional baseball players. Their clients include four other current and former Braves: Brian McCann, Brandon Jones, Chuck James and Chris Resop. They also represent Todd Redmond, Jonny Venters, Cody Johnson and Dustin Evans from the Atlanta minor league system.

Abbott enjoys the constant variety of his job and how baseball parks effectively become his office.

"For the majority of the year – from February through the beginning of November – that's where we go to work," he said. "There could be a lot worse places to go to a job."

Abbott watches his firm's major and minor league players from spring training through the season's end. They discuss any long-term deals that get proposed by teams. He also prepares amateur players for the draft held each June, and then negotiates their contracts once they get selected.

The 38-year-old Abbott was a catcher for his high school baseball team and at Rollins College. After a year, he transferred to Florida State University. He later graduated from Stetson University College of Law.

"I knew that I wanted to do something in sports," said Abbott, who is based in Tampa. "At first, I wanted to do something on the team side and went to law school for that purpose. The only thing that I found coming out of law school was a job as an intern in the St. Louis Cardinals marketing department. My dad said, 'You didn't go to law school to do that.'"

In 1996, Abbott began working at the law firm Foley & Lardner, which represents Major League Baseball. But he spent the majority of his time on other clients. Abbott left the firm in 1999 to start his own agency. He began handling Jones' marketing and, a year later, took over his contract work.

Abbott, who has two people working for him, finds it rewarding to help players from the time they're drafted through their major league debut and beyond. He gets calls and e-mails every week from people interested in becoming sports agents, but cautions that it's tough to break in.

"There is a finite amount of players out there," he said. "There are 750 guys on big league rosters. SFX, [Scott] Boras and CAA are going to have a certain number of them. So, it creates a problem for somebody that wants to get involved with it."

Since successful agents rarely leave their positions, the field sees little turnover. That makes it even more difficult.

"If you can get your foot in the door anywhere, do it," said Abbott. "Because once you get into the industry, there are doors that will open up for you."

ALUMNI NOTES

- An inshore chartered fishing trip with **Gaylord Perry** (RHP, 1981) was auctioned by the Charleston RiverDogs as part of the 5th Annual Hot Stove Banquet & Silent Auction on Jan. 30 at Mark Clark Hall on The Citadel campus. Perry was to be the featured speaker.
- **Clarence "Cito" Gaston** (OF/1B, 1967, '75-78), now manager of the Toronto Blue Jays, was honored with the Jackie Robinson Lifetime Achievement Award Jan. 10 in Kansas City by the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum.
- **Biff Pocoroba** (C, 1975-84), signed autographs and gave out samples from his business, Sausage World in the Atlanta suburb of Lilburn, on Dec. 12 at Leonard's Farmers Market, on Atlanta Highway in Cumming.
- **Andruw Jones** (OF, 1996-2007) and the Dodgers reached an agreement to defer much of his remaining salary, virtually assuring he will not be with them in 2009. He is expected to be traded or released before spring training. The Dodgers owe him $21.1 million from a back-loaded, two-year contract. Jones played 5 games in the Dominican League before the holidays and struck out 8 times in 16 at-bats.
- The Cubs traded **Mark DeRosa** (INF, 1998-2004) to the Indians for three minor league pitchers.
- The Cubs traded **Jason Marquis** (RHP, 2000-03) to the Rockies for reliever Luis Vizcaino.
- The Phillies signed **Marcus Giles** (2B, 2001-06) to a minor league contract.
- Washington signed **Jorge Sosa** (RHP, 2005-06) to a minor league contract.
- The Land Report magazine listed former Braves owner **Ted Turner** (Manager, 1977) as the No. 1 largest landowner in the United States. He owns 2 million acres in Montana, Nebraska, Kansas, South Dakota, New Mexico, Argentina and Tierra del Fuego.
- The Cardinals signed **Royce Ring** (LHP, 2007-08) to a one-year contract.
- **Nick Green** (2B/3B, 2004) signed a minor league contract with Boston.
- The Royals signed **Kyle Farnsworth** (RHP, 2005) to a two-year contract.
- Colorado signed **Alan Embree** (LHP, 1997-98) to a one-year contract.
- **Pete Orr** (INF, 2005-07) and **Ryan Langerhans** (OF, 2002, '05-07) signed minor league contracts with Washington.
- Washington signed **Willie Harris** (OF, 2007) to a two-year contract.
- Kansas City signed **Oscar Villarreal** (RHP, 2006-07) to a minor league contract.
- The White Sox signed **DeWayne Wise** (OF, 2004) to a one-year contract.
- Kansas City signed **Roman Colon** (RHP, 2004-05) to a minor league contract.
- Texas named **Terry Clark** (RHP, 1995) pitching coach at Triple-A Oklahoma City (Pacific Coast League) and **Joe Slusarski** (RHP, 2001) pitching coach at Double-A Frisco (Texas League).
- The Rockies named **Dave Schuler** (LHP, 1985) pitching coach at Asheville (N.C.) of the Class-A South Atlantic League.
- **Ken Oberkfell** (3B/2B, 1984-88) was named manager of the Buffalo Bisons, the Mets' new Triple-A team.
- The Orioles non-tendered **Lance Cormier** (RHP, 2006-07).
- Cincinnati non-tendered **Matt Belisle** (RHP), the Braves' No. 1 draft pick in 1998.
- Florida non-tendered **Joe Nelson** (RHP, 2001), who then signed a one-year contract with Tampa Bay.
- **Jody Davis** (C, 1988-90) was named minor league catching coordinator by the Cubs.

BIRTHDAYS

FEBRUARY

1ST	HAL KING (65)
	KENT MERCKER (41)
2ND	RED SCHOENDIENST (86)
	LEO FOSTER (58)
4TH	MAX LEON (59)
5TH	HANK AARON (75)
	LEE THOMAS (73)
	VIC CORRELL (63)
	NORM MILLER (63)
	MIKE HEATH (54)
	CHRIS BROCK (39)
6TH	CHARLIE GORIN (81)
	BOB WICKMAN (40)
7TH	JUAN PIZARRO (72)
	DAMASO GARCIA (54)
	CHARLIE PULEO (54)
8TH	OSCAR BROWN (63)
9TH	JIM NASH (64)
	ED WHITED (45)
	TODD PRATT (42)
10TH	RALPH HODGIN (93)
	BILLY O'DELL (77)
	LARRY MCWILLIAMS (55)
12TH	KEN SMITH (51)
14TH	LEN G. GABRIELSON (69)
15TH	DUCKY DETWEILER (90)
	JOE HESKETH (50)
16TH	TERRY CROWLEY (62)
	BOB DIDIER (60)
	BILL PECOTA (49)
	DWAYNE HENRY (47)
	RICO ROSSY (45)
	MIKE HUBBARD (38)
17TH	JAMIE EASTERLY (56)
	MIKE MACHA (55)
18TH	DAL MAXVILL (70)
	RAFAEL RAMIREZ (51)
19TH	RUSS NIXON (74)
	BOB SADOWSKI (71)
	DAVE CHEADLE (57)
20TH	DEREK LILLIQUIST (43)
	RYAN LANGERHANS (29)
	BRIAN McCANN (25)
22ND	STEVE COYLER (30)
	KELLY JOHNSON (27)
	CASEY KOTCHMAN (26)
23RD	BOBBY BONILLA (46)
24TH	NICK ESASKY (49)
	STEVE TORREALBA (31)
	DEWAYNE WISE (31)
25TH	ANDY PAFKO (88)
	DENNY LEMASTER (70)
	KEN DAYLEY (50)
26TH	JOHNNY BLANCHARD (76)
	GEORGE KOPACZ (68)
	MARK DEROSA (34)
27TH	PETE SMITH (43)
	JAMES PARR (23)
28TH	MARTY PEREZ (63)
29TH	AL AUTRY (57)

ChopTalk
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ONE FOR THE BOOKS

THIS IS A RECORD that can't be found in the books, and it certainly isn't official. But I'm claiming it anyway: Only fan to ever say, "No," when Hank Aaron offered to sign an autograph.

Now don't get the wrong idea. It's not that I didn't want The Hammer's autograph. Actually, I already had a couple that I obtained as a youngster at now long-departed Forbes Field in Pittsburgh, before people started paying for signatures.

I held Hammerin' Hank in the highest regard then, and still do today, just as I did the day I said, "No."

I bring this up now because so much of this issue is dedicated to the greatest Brave of all as he reaches a milestone in his remarkable life. It's one of my better stories from literally a lifetime as a Braves fan, so I thought it would be a good time to tell it.

First, I should say that I am *not* a collector. No collector would ever say, "No," to Bad Henry! I have an office full of Braves memorabilia, but most of it is magazine covers I created, along with a few things that have been given to me, and a few things I got my hands on as a kid, before I started my career.

The latter category includes a game-used and cracked Aaron bat - an Adirondack A63 model with heavy use markings on the sweet spot and a hand-written "44" in black on the knob. It is a thing of beauty, to say the least!

Though I'm no longer sure what year this prize became my possession, I've pretty well narrowed it down to 1968 by looking at boxscores from that period. My best friend and I, in our teens, were attending a Braves-Pirates doubleheader in Pittsburgh and noticed that Aaron cracked a bat in the first game. It was of interest to us, because we'd recently seen Bob Prince, the late, great Pirates broadcaster, interview Aaron on TV when they discussed, among other things, that Hank seldom broke a bat.

The first game passed, and we were in the midst of watching the second game when a kid selling newspapers in the stands came walking by with a bat in his hands. He saw me wearing a Braves cap and asked if I was interested in buying the bat he obtained from the Braves batboy.

I asked, "How much?"

He said, "$3."

I countered with $2.

We settled on $2.50.

To say that is the best deal I ever made is a major understatement. Believe it or not, though, it was not an easy decision. I was in college at the time and didn't have much money, and I came from a working-class family. If anyone was collecting something like that at the time, I wasn't aware of it. I just wanted it because one of my greatest heroes used it in battle.

When I got home, my father was not too happy that I paid $2.50 for a bat - *cracked* at that!

It has been with me now for over 40 years, and no matter what its worth, I would not part with it. I never considered trying to have it signed. It was a precious piece of history, just the way it was, and I really wasn't interested in having it "altered."

So, I'm old school!

Well, in 1999, I was doing a "commemorative program" that was to be distributed at Turner Field on April 8, the Silver Anniversary of home run No. 715 that Aaron hit April 8, 1974. I had an appointment with the All-Time Home Run King (as many of us still regard him) in his office to do an interview. After much thought, I decided to take the bat with me, just so Henry could hold it and say, "Yes, this definitely was one of mine." Not that I had the slightest doubt - I just wanted that "guarantee."

Almost immediately, Aaron graciously asked if I wanted him to sign the bat. I said, "No thanks. I just want to hear you say it was yours."

Again, he said he'd be glad to sign it. I replied that I really wanted to keep it "au naturale," as I'd had it all those years. Then we proceeded with the interview.

When I got up to leave and thanked The Hammer for his time, he once again said, "Come on, let me sign that bat for you."

Finally, I relinquished, and with a blue Sharpie, he wrote, "Best Wishes Hank Aaron #755."

Thanks for your persistence, Henry, and Happy Birthday!

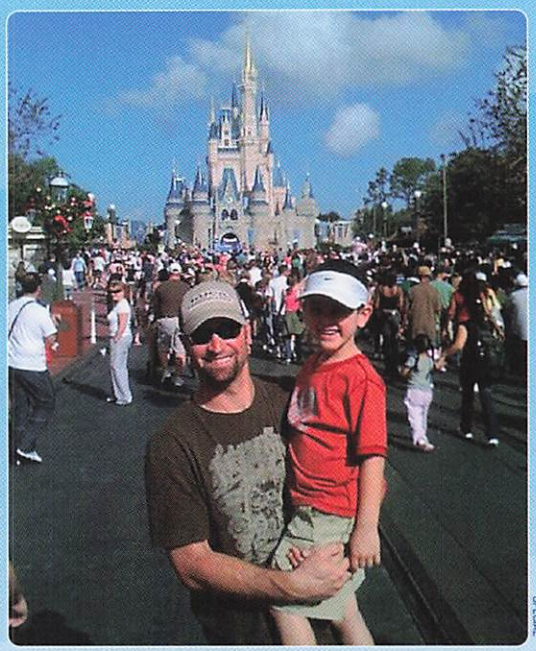
THIS ISSUE OF CHOPTALK was mailed Jan. 22. The March issue will be mailed Feb. 19.

BEYOND BASEBALL

BY **PATTY RASMUSSEN**

Buddy Carlyle and son Carter bask in a pre-spring training Disney moment and some warmth and sunshine they're not used to during winters at home in Nebraska.

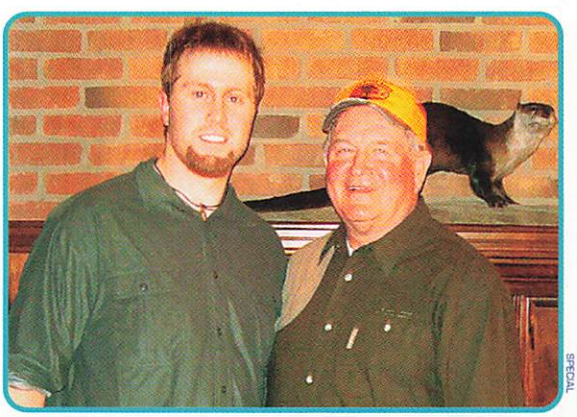
SNOW BIRDS



SPECIAL

BUDDY CARLYLE AND HIS FAMILY, wife **Jessica**, son **Carter**, and daughter **Kennedy**, who live in Nebraska, enjoyed a warm Christmas by spending two weeks in Celebration, Fla., near Disney World. "**Kim** and **Tim Hudson** were nice enough to let us stay in their townhouse," said Jessica. "We were able to give our kids undivided attention and fun! We went to Disney World, swimming, parks, rode go carts, and Carter got to play baseball with Buddy outside, which we never get to do in Nebraska in the winter. It was awesome!" Carlyle also was able to throw outdoors and even got to see teammate **Matt Diaz**, who lives in nearby Winter Haven, while they were in Florida. The Carlyles took a parents-only vacation to Jamaica in early January in order to attend a wedding. In addition to his daily workouts, Carlyle gave baseball lessons at the Ultimate Baseball Academy in Omaha twice a week and held two pitching clinics in late January and early February. Not busy enough chasing around their two children, Jessica spent much of the off-season substitute teaching in the local high schools and finishing work on her Master's degree in secondary education with an English emphasis.

BLAINE BOYER and his wife **Ginsey** hosted Blaine's family for Christmas at their Marietta home, and then spent several days in South Georgia with Ginsey's family near Valdosta. Ginsey's parents, **Ashley** and **Ginger Paulk**, gave Boyer a weekend quail hunting trip at Lenox River Ranch in Lenox, Ga., as a Christmas gift. Boyer was joined by three friends, Cardinals pitcher and former Braves farmhand **Adam Wainwright**, **Brent Schwarzrock**, and **Chris Eble**, and his father-in-law invited his friend, Georgia governor **Sonny Perdue** to join them. The governor brought along his two sons and two sons-in-law. The group ate lunch at the ranch and then hunted all afternoon before returning to the ranch for dinner where they were joined by Ginsey, her parents, her brother, **Buck Paulk**, and his wife, **Kristy**. "The meals were amazing," said Ginsey. "Even those big guys couldn't clean their plates!" The governor and his sons left for Atlanta after dinner, and Ginsey and her family returned to the family farm while Boyer and his buddies remained at the ranch for the rest of the weekend.



SPECIAL

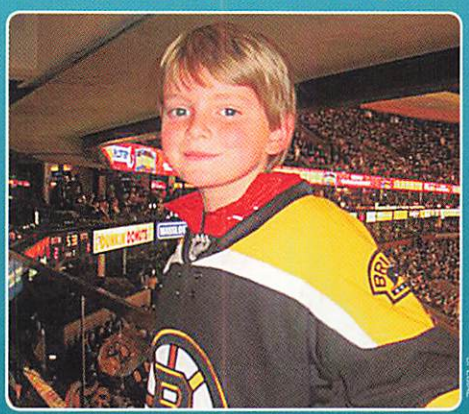
Blaine Boyer enjoys time at the lodge during his quail hunt with Georgia governor Sonny Perdue. Boyer received the hunting trip as a Christmas gift from his in-laws.

After the quail hunting trip, the Boyers visited Wainwright and his wife, **Jenny**, and stayed for a couple of nights at their home on St. Simon's Island, Ga., where the guys played golf.

Tom and **Chris Glavine** are hosting the 14th Tom Glavine's Spring Training event, Feb. 6, at the Georgia Aquarium in downtown Atlanta. The night of gaming and silent and live auctions benefits the Georgia Transplant Foundation. Among last year's attendees were **Jeff Francoeur**, **Brian McCann**, **Tim Hudson**, **Buddy Carlyle**, **Roger McDowell**, **Mark Lemke** and **Ron Gant**...

Tim and **Kim Hudson** spent the week after Christmas at their farm, Kenteska Plantation, near Auburn, Alabama, and celebrated Kim's birthday on Dec. 31. Kim and a group of girlfriends from Peachtree City, Ga., attended the Professional Athletes Outreach (PAO) Wives Conference in San Antonio, Tex., Jan. 13-15. **Ginsey Boyer** also attended the conference. The Hudsons are preparing to host their annual Baseball and Birdies Golf Tournament at spring training, Feb. 22-24. The tournament benefits the

NORTH COUNTRY



TOM GLAVINE and his family, wife **Chris**, daughter **Amber**, and sons **Jonathan**, **Peyton** and **Mason** (R), traveled to Massachusetts and Rhode Island to visit family the day after Christmas. While there, Glavine put on his coaching hat and took Jonathan's hockey team to Stamford, Connecticut, where they participated in the Stamford Youth Hockey Association Holiday Tournament, Dec. 26- 31, and surprised everyone by winning the entire tournament! "The other coach, **Doug Altmeyer**, and I have talked about doing this for the past couple of years," said Glavine, who along with Altmeyer coaches Jonathan's team, the Atlanta Fire Bantam A team. "Our kids always want to know if the kids up North can play better than them. Most of the kids on our team visit family up in the Northeast during Christmas, so we figured, let's do it! We really surprised them all. You could see they were thinking, 'Okay this team's from Atlanta...' They weren't expecting us to be any good. What they didn't know is that most of the kids who play hockey in Atlanta are from the Northeast or Midwest!" The Glavines and their longtime friends, **Scott** and **Tisha Crandall**, and their children, **Aaron** and **Tori**, also went to see the Boston Bruins play the Pittsburgh Penguins on New Year's Day at the TD Banknorth Garden. The kids made a visit to the Bruins' clubhouse and came away with plenty of game-used memorabilia.

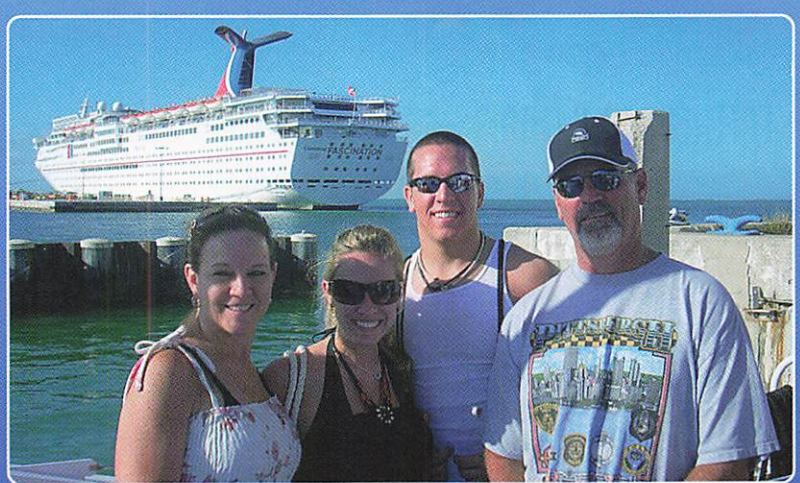
pediatric cancer research programs at the Aflac Cancer Center and Blood Disorders Service at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. Festivities include visiting a Braves spring training practice, a special draw party at the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate, and a day of golf with Braves players at the prestigious ChampionsGate Golf Club's National Course. For sponsor information on the event and playing spots, contact **Dave Winokur** at (404) 785-7373...

Chipper Jones was in Indianapolis, Jan. 10, attending the Archery Trade Association's annual show. As one of the co-owners of Buck Commander DVDs, Chipper said the trip was both business and pleasure. He was able to check out the "competition" and the latest trends in bow hunting. The ATA Trade Show is the largest event of its kind, serving business owners in the archery and bow hunting industry...

Matt Diaz, wife **Leslee**, and children **Nathan** (2) and **Anna Grace** (11 months) had a fun Christmas, then celebrated Nathan's second birthday on Dec. 30 by heating up the pool for a family and friends pool party. Matt traveled to Birmingham, Ala., on Jan. 10 to help with a friend's baseball camp...

The late **Skip Caray** and recent retiree **Pete Van Wieren**, both Braves Hall of Famers, were named co-winners of the **Furman Bisher** Award for sports media excellence by the Atlanta Sports Council. The award will be presented at the Atlanta Sports Awards held Feb. 2 at the Fox Theater's Egyptian Ballroom in Midtown Atlanta. **Paula Caray**, Skip's widow, and Pete and **Elaine Van Wieren** planned to attend with family members and friends.

OUT TO SEA

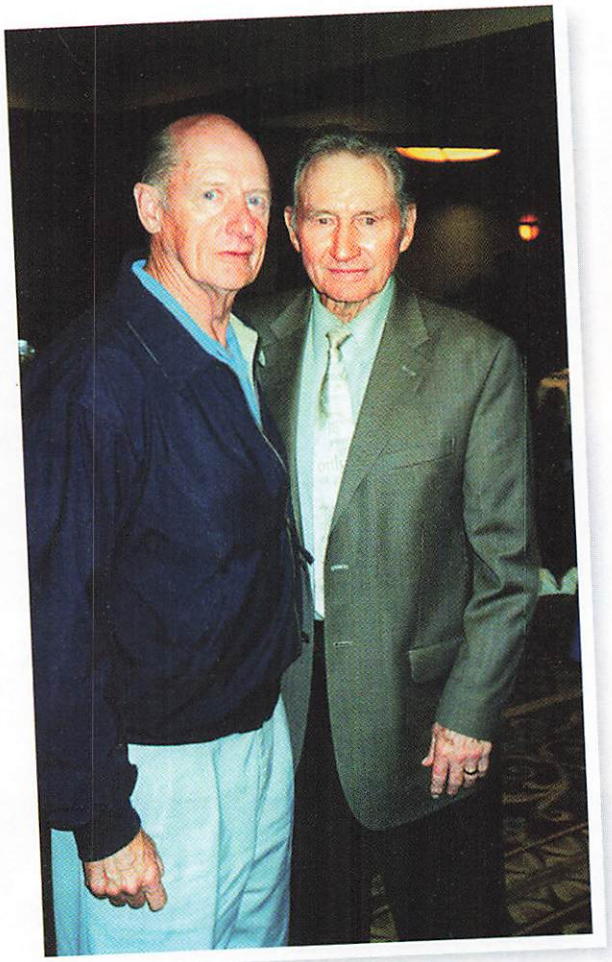


BRIAN SNITKER and his family, wife **Ronnie**, daughter **Erin**, and son **Troy**, celebrated the holidays with a family cruise. "We cruised to Key West and Nassau Bahamas on the Carnival Fascination," said Erin. "We left the 27th and stayed through New Years Day. It was so cool!" One of the highlights of the cruise was a snorkeling expedition on a reef off Key West.

TALKIN' CHOP

LETTERS & PHOTOS FROM OUR READERS

WHETHER YOU'RE HAVING FUN AT TURNER FIELD, EXPERIENCING A CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH YOUR FAVORITE BRAVES PLAYER, OR JUST SHOWING OFF YOUR COLLECTION OF BRAVES STUFF OR TRYING ON YOUR NEW BRAVES SHIRT, WE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT AND SEE A PICTURE.



FUN IN BEANTOWN

My brother and I have been Braves fans since 1946, which if nothing else, makes us pretty old. Last year, we attended the Boston Braves Historical Association annual banquet in Boston. After a memorable tour of the site of old Braves Field, we went to the banquet. I recognized a gentleman behind me as Alvin Dark (R), the former Braves shortstop. He thanked me for remembering him and agreed to have his picture taken with me. What a great guy and what a great thrill for me.

KEN ENGSTRAND
Fort Pierce, Fla.

EGG-STRA! EGG-STRA!

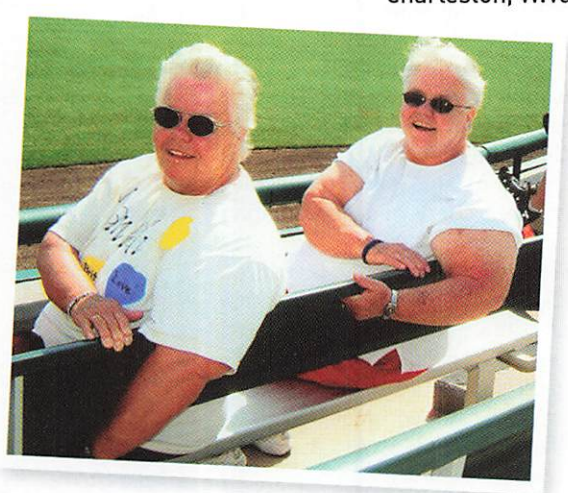
I'm a long-time Braves lover, and it was Easter weekend, nearing the end of spring training. Braves fans were hearing so much about what the 2008 team had to offer, and I was so ready for the season to start! So, I made a Braves Easter egg, with my favorite, #29 on the back.

ELIZABETH MCCALL
Greenbrier, Ark.

DOUBLEPLAY!

Twins Sandra Parsons of Powellton, W.Va., and Sydna Syner of Charleston, W.Va., attended spring training with nephews/sons Tim and Jonathan Syner. They had a ball and are true, blue Braves fans!

ORUILLE E. SYNER
Charleston, W.Va



FAITHFUL IN ILLINOIS

I have been a Braves fan since they were in Boston, following them in Milwaukee and Atlanta. My Braves hero was the late Joe Adcock, who could hit a ball a mile but couldn't run. I played amateur baseball and patterned my play after Joe's. I greatly admired Warren Spahn and later Phil "Knucksie" Niekro. Here in my little village, you're either a Cardinals fan or a Cubs fan... but I remain ever faithful to my beloved Braves. I can't wait for the 2009 season to start, and I'm looking forward to future Hall of Famer Tom Glavine returning to form and finishing his career as a Brave. Bobby Cox is still the best manager in the game.

JIM H. AUGUSTINE
Livingston, Ill.

CHOPTALK AND THE ATLANTA BRAVES SUPPORT OUR TROOPS

FOUR GENERATIONS...

My mother, Betty (R), and I (L) have been Braves fans since the '80s. I started my daughter, Ashley (center) watching the Braves when she was little. Now we've made her son, Tyler (on my lap at 3 months) a Braves fan, too. In the hospital when he was born, I had the Braves game on and had his hospital crib right under the TV! My mother and I never miss a game. She lives in South Carolina, and I live in Tennessee. We even talk about the Braves on the phone when we call each other.

CONSTANCE ELLENBURG
Maryville, Tenn.

RETIREMENT PARTY

I was born in Dodgeville, Wis., and have been a Braves fan since they were in Milwaukee. I retired from the Air Force with 30 years of service. Last year when my wife, Linda, retired, we toured the Braves' training facilities in Florida. Of course, we had to pick up shirts for our grandchildren, Hanson and Larson White of Eden, N.C., and Matthew and Marissa Ogle of Olathe, Kan.

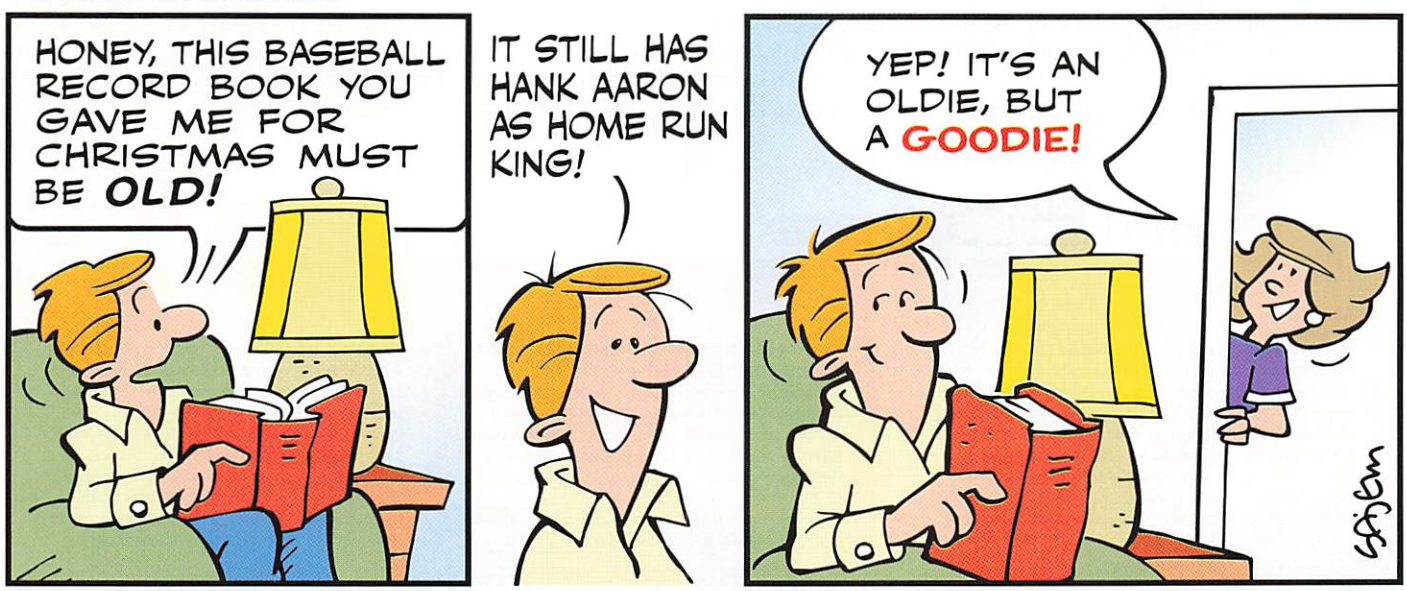
ROGER JOHNSRUD
Mesquite, Nev.

YOUR PICTURES

We **really** look forward to receiving your photos that show your Braves spirit. Please keep in mind, however, that for publication purposes, **photos sent by e-mail must be "high-resolution" images**. Check the setting on the side of your digital camera and adjust it to create the largest possible files. Also keep in mind that **photos taken with a camera phone cannot reproduce well enough to meet our publication standards. We cannot use computer printouts either.**

Please continue to send us your photos! But please be sure to send high-resolution images by e-mail to **letters@choptalkonline.com**, or hard-copy snapshots that are professionally printed via regular mail to **Talkin' Chop, P.O. Box 80750, Conyers, Ga. 30013-8750.**

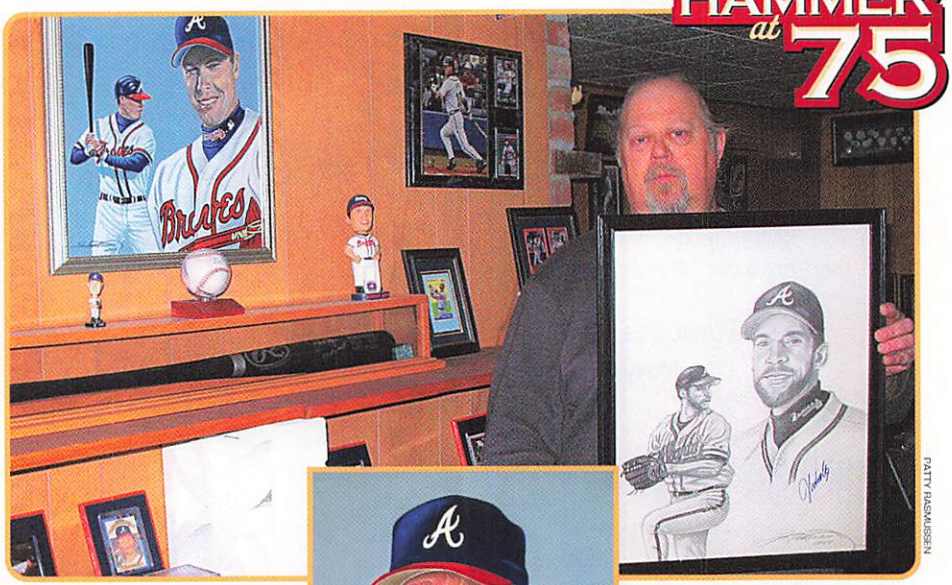
GOLDEN OLDIES


HONEY, THIS BASEBALL RECORD BOOK YOU GAVE ME FOR CHRISTMAS MUST BE OLD!
IT STILL HAS HANK AARON AS HOME RUN KING!
YEP! IT'S AN OLDIE, BUT A GOODIE!

THE ART OF BEING A FAN

BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

The HAMMER at 75



PATTY RASMUSSEN

Lew Hartman, displaying some of his work and collectibles, is creating a portrait of Hank Aaron he plans to give him later in the year.

HANK AARON celebrates his 75th birthday on February 5, but it will be several months before he receives his birthday gift from Lew Hartman. A lifelong Braves fan, Hartman is creating a special oil portrait of the Braves' home run hitting legend as a token of his appreciation for Aaron.

"I just felt like it was time for the fans to step up and tell Hank how much he means to us," said Hartman, who has made arrangements through the Braves' PR department and Aaron's office, to meet Aaron privately at some point during the season and give him the painting.

A Philadelphia native, Hartman attended college (Mercer University) and graduate school (University of Georgia) in Georgia in the 1960s, becoming a rabid Braves fan in the process. It's a love affair that continues to this day, despite his living in Randolph, Vermont, a mere 1,141 miles from Turner Field. Hartman, 57, keeps up with the Braves by subscribing to ChopTalk, watching as many games as he can on television, and via the internet, reading and commenting on the Braves' blog written by Atlanta Journal-Constitution beat writer David O'Brien.

Hartman, who works primarily in pencils, acrylics and oil, made a living doing sports illustration, though he's now retired. He has created an entire gallery of sketches and paintings that are displayed in his home, along with his impressive collection of memorabilia. Examples of his work can be found online at lewhartman.com. Some of the artwork has even been autographed by the subjects.

"I had the opportunity to meet Chipper Jones at spring training, and he signed the painting I did of him," said Hartman, who also did a painting of deer that now hangs at Jones' Double Dime Ranch in Texas.

In addition to the painting of Aaron, Hartman is also gathering written reminiscences about Aaron from other fans and regular blog contributors. He plans to put the material in book form for Aaron.

"One reason I wanted to do this is because I didn't want to say one day, 'I wish I had told him (Aaron) what he means to us,'" Hartman said.

"He was the cream of the crop of baseball players. Living in Philadelphia, I got to see him play up there about 11 times each year, and I had great admiration for him on a skills level," Hartman continued.

"As an adult, knowing what he went through in the 1950s and 60s, he handled himself like a gentleman. He never seemed so impressed with himself that he had to interject himself as the best. I hope what we can give him means a lot to him, because he means a lot to us. After all, it's the fans' game, too."

FAN CLUBS

BRAVES 400 CLUB

BRAVES 400 CLUB The Braves 400 Club is the official fan club of the Atlanta Braves. It is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting baseball at all levels. Annual membership is $25 and includes a newsletter and the opportunity to participate in activities such as road trips, luncheons, the annual banquet, and charitable events. Send payment to: Braves 400 Club, P.O. Box 7689, Atlanta, Ga. 30309. For more information, call the organization's hotline at (770) 416-4539 or visit braves400.org. Annual winter banquet Jan. 31. Call or visit web site for tickets.

MILWAUKEE BRAVES HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

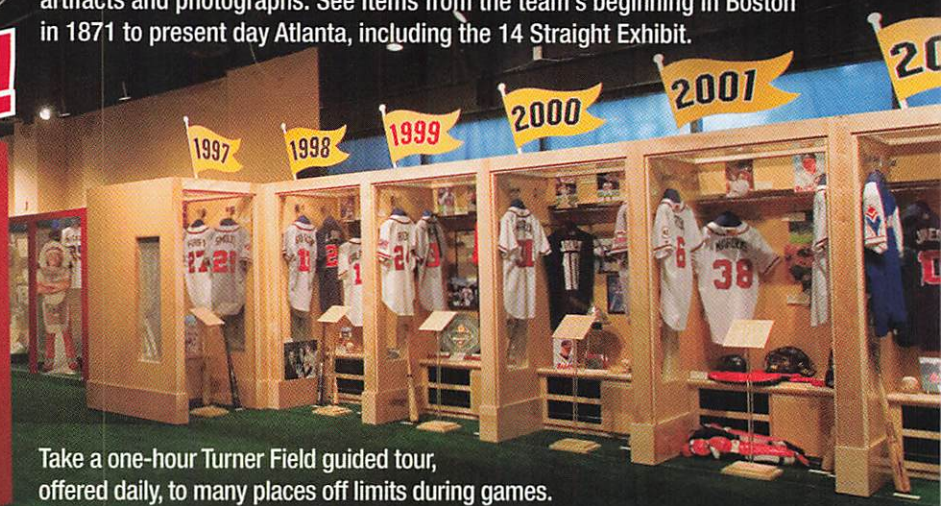
MILWAUKEE BRAVES HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION The Milwaukee Braves Historical Association is a non-profit organization that promotes the memory of the Milwaukee Braves (1953-65). Annual membership is $25 and includes a newsletter. Send payment to: Milwaukee Braves Historical Association, 6700 N. Range Line Rd., Glendale, Wisc. 53209. For information, call (414) 347-1212 or visit 57braves.com. Banquet to honor Bob Uecker May 11. Call or visit web site for information.

BOSTON BRAVES HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

BOSTON BRAVES HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION The Boston Braves Historical Association is a non-profit organization dedicated to keeping alive the memory of the Braves in the city where the franchise began in 1871 and that it represented through 1952. Annual membership is $15 and includes a newsletter. Send payment to: Boston Braves Historical Association, P.O. Box 5668, Marlboro, Mass. 01752. For more information, call (508) 485-1423 or visit Boston-braves.com.

VISIT TODAY!

Visit the Braves Museum at AISLE 134 and view more than 600 Braves artifacts and photographs. See items from the team's beginning in Boston in 1871 to present day Atlanta, including the 14 Straight Exhibit.



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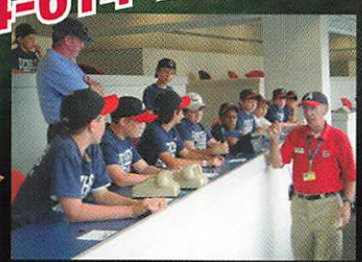

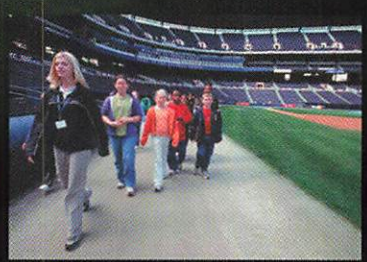

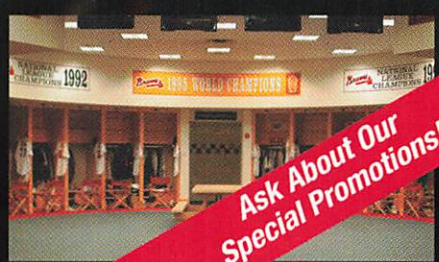

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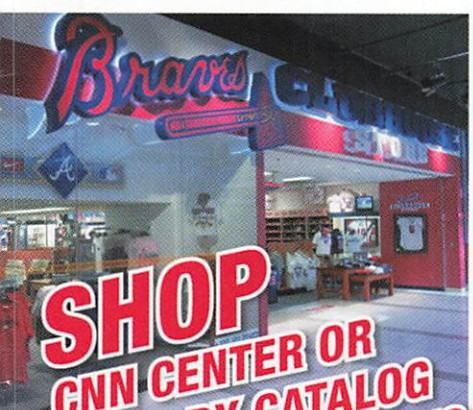

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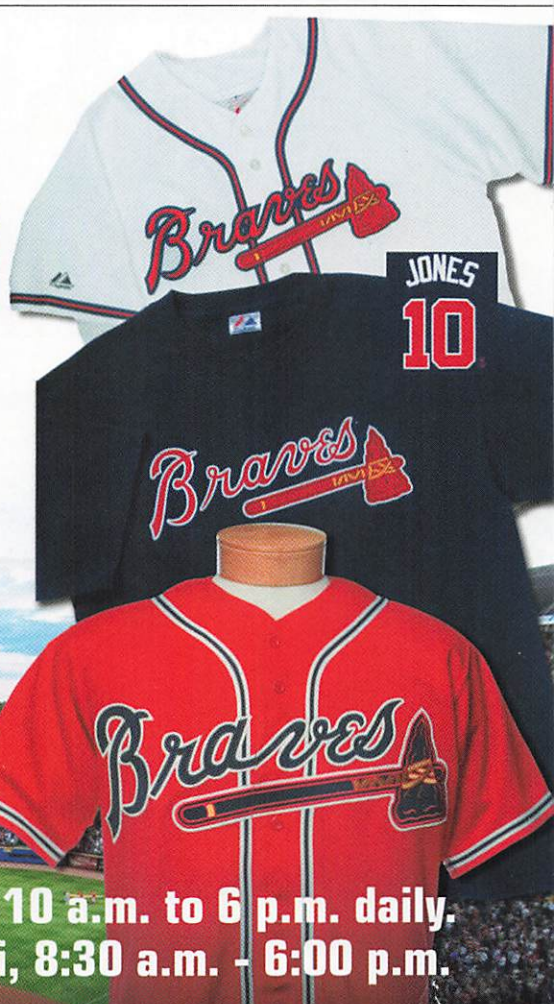

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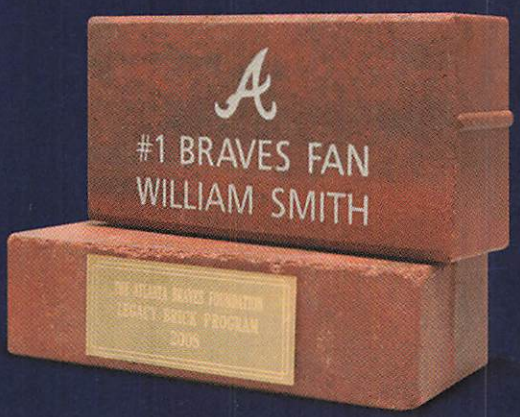

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